

Obviously by Menirva

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Summary:

Billy didn't die. That means he has to do something even harder--grow as a person. It takes him down a road he never thought he'd go, and to two familiar faces who are just as surprised to see him again.

1. Chapter 1

Author's Note:

Takes place post season three. Billy doesn't die. Steve and Nancy had their season two fight, but both grew up and they made it work.

The problem no one had been prepared to deal with after the battle of Star Court was what had been lost. The Mind Flayer has laid its roots deep, infected hundreds in town. During that chaotic battle, it had absorbed its own army for strength, to birth itself into their universe's existence. One by one, familiar faces of friends and family had oozed and congealed together into a horror show intent on ending everything.

They'd 'won', but they'd also lost. In the end, it hadn't been like the movies where the big bad monster was defeated and all of the people under its control were suddenly free and clear to go about their lives. They had all been one, a wriggling mass of power, and when the smoke from smoldering fireworks had cleared, there was no sign of anything in the wreckage but a monster. The mall, the entire town, had been searched for days, but they hadn't come back. No one came back.

That night, Steve had stumbled back to his empty house, covered in his own blood. The drugs had finally worked out of his system, and the pain in his chest had been so sharp he could barely breathe when he finally lowered himself into bed.

"Steve?"

Nancy's voice was a fuzzy hum in his ears, like he'd dunked his head

into the pool and she was calling for him just above the surface. He groaned, barely cracking his purpled eyes open. It was still dark. He hadn't managed the bedroom light, and his face was still covered in blood, now smeared with drool because his jaw was so swollen he couldn't close his mouth right. Real sexy all around. He didn't know why she was still with him.

"Steve!" Her small hands were on his shoulders, and she carefully pulled him up to sit. The entire room swam. Maybe they'd all gone for a summer dunk in his family pool. He almost smiled, but then his stomach roiled, and he leaned forward sharply. He retched, stomach bile flecking the nightstand trash can since his stomach didn't have anything else to give. When had he eaten last? Had it been days ago? Before he'd managed to get himself trapped in a secret Russian underground?

"I thought you went to the hospital. I've been out looking for you." There was worry in her tone, and Steve's chest twisted with guilt. Nancy had been worried sick about him for days when he'd vanished, fearing the worst even as she worked with Jonathan to try and help the town. They'd reunited at the mall, and she'd only agreed to let him go because he'd said he'd go to the hospital. That had been the plan. It had, and he'd told her he was heading there so she'd stay with Mrs. Byers and help with the kids, but...

"Sorry. M'sorry, Nance. Billy needed the ambulance. Just didn't wanna... make a big deal." He was aware his words were slurred, but that was his jaw's fault. When he blinked enough, his vision cleared so he could actually see her more, surrounded by a soft halo of moonlight peeking in from the window. Her clothes were shredded in spots, she was covered in soot smudges, and her hair licked out in almost every direction but down.

He cracked a pained smile. “Pretty tonight.”

“Steve.” Nancy shook her head, self-consciously running her hands through her hair. “You need to go to a doctor.”

“Mean it.” He did. She was never prettier than when she'd been fighting with everything she had. Nancy had a spine like steel. Her fragile hands were the strongest he'd ever held, and sometimes thinking about that made him dizzier than any punch in the face could.

And he'd had a *lot*.

“I'm ok, just want... just want to sleep, ok?” He was already easing back down onto the bed, sinking and sighing and ignoring how that sent a sharp pain through his chest.

Nancy worried her bottom lip between her teeth. It was cute, sweet, and always led to chapped lips. She'd made him start carrying a little tin of lip balm in the glove box for her, cherry Lip Lickers. It only tasted good on Nancy's lips. He'd found that out the hard way in a moment of boredom by himself.

“Ok, but, I'm staying,” she decided, and that was more than fine with him. She rarely spent the night, always worried about what her parents would think, but he loved when she fell asleep beside him. He could hear her leave the room, the bathroom sink running. The glass of water she held up to his lips was heaven on his raw throat. The washcloth across his face less so, he winced and hissed through most of it, but he had to admit it felt a lot nicer after the layers of

dried blood and other grime were gone.

“*There* you are,” Nancy murmured, a small smile lighting her lips as she set the cloth down. “I was starting to wonder.

“Here I am,” Steve whispered back hoarsely, eyes already closed. He could feel her slipping into bed beside him, and he reached, made grabby hands at her until she giggled quietly, relented and carefully curled up into his arms.

“I’m not leaving this bed for a week,” he muttered against her hair, huffing when it tickled his lips.

“I guess it’s a good thing neither of us have a job anymore, then,” Nancy mused, her soft fingertips tracing across his chest. Oh geeze. He *still* had his dumb Scoops uniform on. He always hated when she saw him in it, even if she never cared—“Wait, you’re staying?” he asked, realizing what she’d said.

“Mhm, someone has to look after you, Steve Harrington.” Nancy took his hand and kissed his knuckles. “At least until your parents get back.”

But. Steve’s parents hadn’t come back. Not the next day, or the next, or the rest of the week. He’d slowly come to suspect, but... he hadn’t even known they’d been in town that night. His father was always on superfluous ‘business’ trips. His mother always went with him. When he was about ten, and his mother had popped too many Valium, he’d

learned that they rarely stayed in the same hotel. Steve had always tried to ignore that knowledge. Now, he tried to ignore this knowledge. Told himself that they'd just stayed away longer with everything going on. They would know he was fine and just hadn't had time to tell him...

It was dumb. It was so dumb. They hadn't even called. Sure, they could be really shitty about keeping track of him, or even letting him know when they were going, but there was an *explosion* at the place he worked, according to news reports, and even they would have picked up the phone to check on him. But, if he ignored it, if he didn't say anything, then they were just away. They'd be back soon.

The house had been quiet for most of that day. Steve was feeling well enough to be out of bed. They were downstairs, just watching a movie. Neither of them were really cooks, so it was microwave dinners and some old science fiction movie that neither of them were really watching. Nancy would look over at Steve on occasion, and his gaze was far away, sad. The air wasn't tense, but it felt thick, heavy. The way the sky felt before a downpour. Nancy hadn't left, neither of them had left the house for more than a quick grocery and first aid supply run since she had found him practically broken into pieces in his own bed.

She knew Steve's relationship with his parents had always been... Strained. He'd talked about it more when they had started to get closer. When their own relationship had started to turn into more than just going steady at school. She understood him more when he did.

They'd been fighting in his car after school. She wasn't even sure what had started it, but Nancy had been spending more time with Jonathan, and she could tell Steve was worried, that he couldn't let himself believe they were just friends. That hurt, that he couldn't trust her. She wasn't going to stop being friends with Jon because of it, and they'd come to an impasse. They'd shouted, and now Steve wouldn't look at her. He was just starting off hard into the distance.

"Nance, let's just be honest, ok? You'd be better off with him. We all know I'm not going anywhere, and I don't want you to stay with me out of some kind of shitty sense of pity. That'd..." Steve trailed off, his fingers rubbing over his steering wheel, picking at a little bit of stitch that had come undone from wear. "Nancy, I think that would hurt more than anything else. Knowing I screwed up your life, too."

"I'm not, and Steve, I don't ever want you to think that, ok?" Nancy had pulled on his shoulder, hugged him to her in the cramped front seat. Her heart had hurt over how little Steve thought of himself.

It made her realize that this boiled down to not so much him thinking she couldn't be faithful, but him thinking he wasn't someone worth holding onto. Steve was always calling himself an idiot. A shitty boyfriend, a loser. He wasn't any of those things, but she couldn't just convince him of that. He'd have to learn to believe it himself.

"I want to be with you, Steve. I do, but you're not going to tell me who I can be friends with, that's not ever going to be ok."

"You're right." Steve nodded quickly against her shoulder and his grip on her turned more solid, something that felt less like a cling, and more like

him just hugging her close. “Look, I’m sorry. My parents’ problems... They’re not a fucking excuse, and I don’t have to make them my problems, too. It’s shitty of me to think you and me are anything like them.”

There were those 'make or break' points in relationships. That had made them, and they'd been together ever since. Not perfect, there were still good and bad points, rocky parts. She'd worked, though, and so had Steve. He'd become friends with Jonathan, who had helped them both the summer before when Nancy had almost given herself a breakdown over Barb's death and projected those thoughts and blames onto Steve. They'd all worked together to come up with a plan to expose the truth while keeping the people they cared about safe.

Now, Nancy called her mother daily to let her know she was still ok, that she was staying with different friends. She lied to her the way daughters do, and her mother pretended to believe her the way mothers do. Most days she would feel guilty about that. Now, she was just grateful she had a mother to lie to. And she did feel guilty about *that*.

They both knew he would have to face it eventually, but Steve wasn't ready to deal with it. Nancy would be there when he was ready to. She laid down with him again that night. And when she laid her hand on his shoulder, she felt his skin trembling.

“*Nance.*” Steve choked out the word quietly, burying his face against her shoulder. She blinked away the dampness in her own eyes and rubbed his back gently.

“I know, Steve. I know.”

Several Years Later

Steve was arranging some papers in the office trailer outside of their latest construction site. He was trying to feel busy, but feeling like maybe he could cut out early, for once. For once, there wasn't a lot going on. It felt good. They'd both put in a lot of long nights to get here.

When he'd taken over his dad's construction business, he'd felt like a fish out of water. He'd been so hell bent on not becoming his father that he'd done an entire reverse and never learned a damn thing about his company. In fact, he'd almost sold it to whomever would buy it.

After he'd contacted the police about his parents' disappearance, after they'd been ruled lost in the explosion, his father's lawyer had paid him a visit. Steve had a trust fund set up in his name in the event of their deaths. His parents' house was paid off. Dad had been a terrible husband, not a terrible business man. Steve could have coasted by for years on those coat tails.

But he hadn't wanted to. He was tired of that. So he asked the smartest girl he knew for help. Nancy had sat down with him that night, and she'd signed them both up for business classes at the closest community college. He had *immediately* regretted asking the smartest girl he knew for help. He *hated* classes, had promised himself he was done with that after barely getting through high

school.

Now... Shit, he was really grateful. He hadn't crashed and burned, he was actually... Kind of good at this? And Nancy... She hadn't gone home after that week. She'd stayed, and now she was running the books, and a co-owner, so they were on their way to becoming *great* at this. He wondered on his best days if his dad might have been almost... Proud of him?

Probably not. But maybe that didn't matter. Maybe that cheating asshol—

His train of thought derailed when there was a knock on the office trailer. He'd sent a lot of the guys home earlier with the promise that they could pick up more hours tomorrow, because the weather was calling for a downpour. "Uh, yeah?"

The door pushed open, and Steve looked up just in time to blink slowly in surprise. Billy Hargrove. He hadn't seen him in a couple of years, at least. Not since... He knew he was still in town, knew from Max that he'd spent over a month in the hospital, but they didn't exactly run in the same circles. Not anymore, anyway. Here he was, though, same tight jeans, same jacket. Only difference was his shirt was actually buttoned up to the collar, almost professional. His hair looked freshly washed, and none of his usual array of bad boy jackets or accoutrements were anywhere to be seen.

"No way. Hargrove?" Steve breathed out, then realized that maybe sounded dumb.

“Harrington.” Billy had closed the door behind him, his eyes slowly traveling around the small expanse of office and taking it in before he stepped up to the desk. Steve wished he had stood when he’d heard the door. It felt too much like Billy looking down at him again. He shook off the thought. This wasn’t high school anymore. He’d just call the police if the other guy tried anything. He was *pretty* sure Billy wasn’t still holding a grudge from the whole cabin fight thing. Pretty sure.

“That’s me. What are you doing here?” Steve asked, not *impolitely*, but firmly. He hoped.

“I heard it was you running the whole damn thing here.” Billy drawled out the words slowly, thoughtfully, like he couldn’t quite believe it. Steve should have probably been offended, but he couldn’t really blame him.

“Signs on the door and everything,” he said glibly, instead.

Billy looked at him, and his face split into a slow, open mouth grin. He dropped into the creaky chair in front of Steve’s desk and stretched his legs out.

“Guess so, shit.”

Steve watched him still trying to figure out what weird twist of the universe this was. Things had clearly been too quiet if it decided to throw Billy Hargrove back at him. “So what *are* you doing here?” He repeated the question that Billy hadn’t exactly answered.

Billy rolled his shoulders like he was ready to relax, get comfortable. Not really what Steve wanted. "Heard you had a couple spots open. Thought I'd see about it."

"You...Oh." Nancy had put a classified ad out a few days ago. They'd been short for a while now, and making due, but business was picking up, especially with summer quickly approaching. They needed more crew. "Doesn't your expertise usually lie more in little red swim trunks this time of year?" Steve blurted out quickly, surprised by the entire situation.

Billy paused and gave him a slightly funny look, something Steve couldn't really decipher. "That was for one summer, Harrington... it uh, doesn't exactly pay the bills."

"Oh sure." Steve wondered briefly if it had paid better than 'Scoops Ahoy'. Probably not. Jesus, he didn't miss that ice cream shop for a second. He sat back in his chair more. As weird as this situation was, he'd gotten used to interviewing people now, and that familiarity helped put him more at ease. "Ok... Well, do you have any sort of experiences or references?" He reached for the pad of paper he kept on the desk now, and a mostly working pen. "A resume?"

Billy stared almost blankly for a long pause before he spoke. "I could give you a few names. Not for construction..." His voice trailed off a little, and for the first time since Steve had met him, Billy seemed a little... uncertain of himself. "I've been doing odd jobs around town. I'm sure..."

"Ok, sure," Steve cut him off gently before the pause got too

awkward. Billy had come in empty handed, and he was pretty sure he didn't have a resume folded up in his back pocket. "I... Look, I can't just hire you on the spot, but if you leave your number I'll run it by Nancy. Maybe we can find someplace for you to fit." That was a lie. Nancy trusted him to know who to hire, just like he did when she was the one doing interviews. It was an excuse, and a flimsy one. The way Billy looked at him, he knew it, too.

"Sure. Thanks." Billy's tone went flat. He gripped the chair handles to push out of it, and started for the door, clearly just as ready to be out the door as Steve had been to get him there. "You do that."

Steve looked at Billy as he walked towards the door, *really* looked at him. The boots he'd worn were free from mud, but they were worn down hard. They looked like they should have been replaced a year ago. His jeans had too many holes in them in the wrong places to really be put down as 'in fashion'.

He hadn't kept in touch with the kids as much as he would have liked, but he'd known Max's stepdad had been one of the hundreds who'd 'disappeared' during the mall explosion. He'd heard that there had been some life insurance involved, but those things only lasted so long. Max's mom had taken over Joyce Byers' old job at the town store when she'd left, but if Steve had to guess... things were tight. Billy had known Steve was the owner here now, so to come here looking for work... Billy had to be desperate.

"Hang on, just a second, ok?" Steve held back a sigh. He wasn't an asshole. Or at least he'd left his asshole days behind him a while ago. He tugged open the desk drawer with a shrill creak, and pulled out the binder full of spreadsheets Nancy had organized for him. "Let me see if we have anything that you can fit into, get you on the books, at least, for something."

Billy paused, hand on the door, squeezing it too tight. "...Yeah?"

"Yeah, why not, come on, sit down." Steve waved towards the chair again. He could do this for Max.

"Thought you had to ask your girlfriend?" Billy rolled the words out between his tongue and teeth with a wary look. Like he didn't quite trust Steve not to be fucking with him right now.

"I can fill her in, later. I'm sure she won't mind." Steve watched him saunter back over slowly, dropping back into the chair. That uncertainty from earlier was gone, evaporated as quickly as it had come.

"And it's uh, wife, actually," Steve added, feeling a little sheepish and giddy over the word still, even though the honeymoon had been over a year ago.

Billy paused at the information, then glanced down at the golden band on Steve's finger, clearly digesting the whole thing before he barked out a sharp laugh, pressing his tongue to the back of his front teeth. "Well shit, Harrington, congratulations."

"Thanks." Steve didn't care if Billy meant it or not. He grinned, surprised when the grin back from the other man seemed at least a little genuine. "Ok, let me see." He opened the binder and ran his finger down the list they'd agreed on a week or so ago. He was quiet for a few minutes, thinking it over. When he glanced up, he noticed

Billy was leaning in a little, seeming almost anxious until he realized Steve's eyes were on him, then he sank back in his chair, drummed his fingers against the arm of it like he was being patient for Steve's sake more than his own.

"Ok, look. We have a day laborer spot open, odd jobs around the sites, mostly just helping out moving equipment and supplies. It's tedious, but not a bad starting wage... But have you thought about apprenticing? We have some welding spots open that we need to fill, but we're really short on skilled labors. I have two guys who are willing to train. It's not as much money, not at first, but if you're willing to stick with it for six months, you can get certified, and I can bump you up from apprentice. You would be making a lot more than you would just hauling gear."

"...Yeah? You'd do that?"

"Uh, sure? I mean, yeah, sure." Steve bobbed his head. They really were short, and if Billy could hack it, well, it really would be better for everyone all around. It wasn't like he'd even have to see the guy that much. Not that it had been so awful right then. Billy was on his best behavior, though. Steve didn't see any reason to expect him to keep that up.

"Alright..." Billy seemed to roll the idea around in his head. "Alright, yeah. I could do that," he agreed. Steve noticed he wasn't exactly *asking* for the position, but he could let that go.

"Sure. There's a packet you can take home with you to fill out. You'll need a physical before you're cleared for work, but if you get it done over the weekend, you could start Monday."

Billy nodded. "...Yeah, sure. No problem. Monday's good."

Steve had ended up digging out a new employee packet and sending Billy out, watching him go, thoughtfully. He had mixed emotions about the whole thing really, but hopefully he hadn't just done anything too stupid.

Going to see Harrington had been swift kick in his pride, and Billy, well, he had had quite a few kicks to his pride these days.

See, the last thing Billy expected to do after Star Court, after feeling his body torn into, feeling all of the pain and sacrifice, and living those horrors... was to wake up. That felt like the cruelest joke of all. He'd gone out making a big heroic sacrifice, feeling like maybe he'd wiped the slate clean of all the bad, shitty things he'd done... A nice, easy cop out.

Living after that, owning up to and living with all of the terrible things he'd done as a shitbag teenager before an otherworldly creature even came sniffing near him... Well, Billy hadn't fucking signed up for *any of that*. He'd been ready to do his time and check out, not drift back into existence with more tubes stuck into him than there had been tentacles, with a mop of ratty ginger hair resting on his shoulder.

"God, you stink, shitbird," Billy wheezed out. His eyes felt sticky. There was no moving, even just breathing hurt. Even those words felt like they

took every ounce of strength he had in him. He hadn't known it then, but his breathing tube had just come out the day before, his lungs finally strong enough to support his body again. Barely.

Max popped her head up, disoriented, wiping a line of sleep drool off the corner of her mouth. "Mpmh—Billy?" Her face screwed up before it lightened. She smiled and Jesus, he was pretty sure he'd never actually seen the kid smile in his life. Not that he'd ever given her a reason to. There were fuzzy memories rolling around in the corners of his brain, trapped, in a sauna and in his own mind. Heat closing in as he begged her for help before it took over again, used him to try and destroy all of them.

"Hey, Maxine. Shower much?"

"God, you're such an asshole. You're lucky I even cared if you died," Max whispered out, her hand going over his. Billy couldn't turn his head, but he could see the shine at the corners of her eyes. And she was right. He didn't even understand why she DID care if he died... But it felt good, good to know that at least one person in the world would.

"Thanks," he whispered. When he closed his eyes again, he felt a little squeeze to his hand.

Change. It wasn't easy, Billy had spent years shutting himself up, striking out. He wasn't going to turn into some kind of fucking boy scout overnight. Sometimes he snapped at Max, and oh, she'd fucking snap right back. They'd both scream shit they didn't mean, and break plates or slam doors. Sometimes, he just couldn't resist shoving some dumb asshole that would get on his nerves or lifting something he really wanted but couldn't afford from a shop. But he tried. Fuck, he tried. It was a hard thing to make up for the wrong he'd done before he lost control of his mind and body, let alone after. Those things

liked to keep him up at night. He'd lie up and stare at the ceiling like he was at his favorite drive in, the reel on an endless 3D loop, technicolor and surround sound all included for free.

He remembered taking Neil. He remembered they had made it *hurt* for him to change, because god, it had made Billy feel *so good*. He might have still been powerless, but in that moment, he'd felt strong. It was the only moment he hadn't fought.

Susan had been out that night, with some girlfriends. That had been her only saving grace. Not because Billy was any kind of generous, just from sheer dumb luck. Because nothing would have stopped him. The Mind Flayer inside of him had driven him into a frenzy of anger, and jealousy, and hate. It had been so easy, it barely had to try. Those were roads he'd driven down so long that there were deep ruts along the path. His tires had been stuck, and it had taken an actual car crash, and that weird, intense bug eyed girl, to flip him out of it.

But regardless of how it happened, Neil was gone, and money was tight. Billy's hospital bills sure as shit hadn't helped... But Sue never said a word of complaint about them. They never spoke about Neil. Billy had thought she might kick him out of the house. There really wasn't any reason she had to let him stay. But, when he'd been discharged, he'd found clean sheets on his bed, and all of his stuff right where he'd left it. Sue had asked him what he'd like for dinner.

It took some time for him to understand that, in a lot of ways, she'd felt just as trapped as he had. He'd never seen Neil hit her... But she'd never seen Neil hit him, either. His dad had been a smart asshole like that. Maybe both of them knew, but if they didn't see it, well, they could pretend they didn't know for sure, that it wasn't their business. Maybe Sue looking after him was her idea of some kind of redemption for herself in Billy's eyes, just like him not abandoning the house when things got tough now was for him. He could, he had

enough 'friends' he could couch surf, get by chipping in here and there. But where would that put his bratty little sister when he was just starting to like her?

Billy's boots scraped some of the gravel up from the road leading back from the construction site. It was a long walk back home, but it didn't seem nearly so bad if he was going home with some good news. Harrington didn't seem like someone to back down on an agreement, and he had a shot here of actually making some decent fucking cash for once.

Day might have almost been a half good one if it hadn't start pouring. It was a drizzle at first, little flecks of chilly water frizzing out his hair and covering his face. He swore and started to jog lightly, even knowing he had no chance of outrunning it. Sure enough, he hadn't even gotten to the next road before the buckets started. His boots started to squelch into the mud in no time, and he swore out loud to no one in particular since the street was a good stretch away from town.

Just fucking perfect. He resigned himself to be soaked down to the bone and then some by the time he got home.

2. Chapter 2

Steve flipped the wipers on at the first sign of drizzle. He squinted until the windshield was wet enough to wipe away the muddy coating that always developed on the car when he parked it on-site and it rained. Hazard of working near constant construction. It took him a second to realize there was someone walking down the side of the road, and then another to realize just who it was.

He ended up slowing the car down to a stop before he even really thought about the action. By the time he rolled down his window and looked at Billy, he realized he didn't really have anything to say, so he stared awkwardly at the other man, taking in the way his curls had gone stringy, how his jeans had turned a shade darker and were sticking to his thighs while his shirt had become almost translucent, clinging to his skin.

"Uh..." Steve gaped, not really sure where to go from there. How bad would it be to just roll the window back up and keep driving? Probably bad.

Especially because Billy had turned slightly by then, and caught sight of him. He scoffed, shaking the water out of his hair, for all of the good it did. His lip curled up a little and there he was, *that* was the Billy that Steve was more familiar with. "You come to watch the show?"

"What? Wait, no." Steve shook his head quickly. "I just didn't know you'd walked." It was *hours* back into town. There was no way he could just let him walk, so he leaned across the car to pop the passenger door open. "What happened to your car?" I mean, he knew what *had* happened, but that had been years ago. He'd assumed Billy

had had it fixed up, or gotten something to replace it since then.

Billy's eyes narrowed, and it was hard to tell if it was annoyance or if he was trying to keep the rain out of them. Probably annoyance. He snorted finally. "It's in the shop," he lied with a hard set to his jaw. It wasn't hard to tell it was a lie. Steve just bobbed his head in a nod. It didn't really matter why he was lying, and he wasn't looking to provoke Billy.

"Well get in, ok?"

"I'm fine walking."

"Jesus, just come on. You look like a drowned rat or something. Besides, you can't work if you have pneumonia or some kinda shit on Monday," Steve pointed out very reasonably. "So get in, and you can have the satisfaction of ruining my passenger seat."

Steve watched Billy's face twist from annoyance into some sort of amusement.

"Fine, but my boots are shot, too, gonna have to get the whole thing cleared out," Billy warned him, scraping some of the mud off on the underside of the car as best he could. It was honestly more courteous than Steve had expected. He waited for Billy to settle in, blasting the heat for him before he pulled back onto the road.

They didn't exactly have a lively conversation on the way back. No

heartfelt apologies for their past selves, or talk about the crazy shit that had gone down years ago. Steve mainly focused on the road, the rain giving him a good excuse, and Billy fiddled with the radio for a while, trying to get in some obscure rock and roll station Steve was only vaguely aware of. He gave up after another burst of fuzz, and there was just silence for a while, except for the constant pouring of rain over the car hood.

"You really didn't have to," Billy finally muttered quietly. There was a shiver to his skin despite the heat Steve had on as high as he could crank it. The tips of his fingers were drumming against the window, one tap, two, a little rhythm that meant nothing to Steve, but Billy seemed to have it down.

"I know," Steve agreed, because that was simply a fact. He didn't have to, but he had because he should. "Still at the old place, right?" he checked, and Billy just nodded in silence. "See, that's right on the way." He lied. Billy lived on the other side of town. One of those neighborhoods his dad used to call an 'eyesore', and the people in it, too. He pulled up to the old place. Through the rain, he could see the small parking space outside was empty, the half open garage only housing a bike he recognized as Max's.

Steve felt dumb when the obvious smacked him in the face. A car was something he'd always taken for granted. His parents had bought his for him. With his old one wrecked so long ago, it didn't even occur to him that Billy might not *have* a way to work. He scrambled as he watched Billy reaching for the door handle, knowing he couldn't just let him go like that and have him walk hours to work on Monday. Between that and overtime, Billy would burn himself out in no time.

"Hey, oh, uhm, I forgot to mention the uuuh..." Steve paused far too long at trying to find the words, and he held back a wince. "The

company carpool!” He got the last words out triumphantly, and watched as Billy's hand paused on the door handle as he twisted back slightly in his seat to fix a wary look on him.

“The company car pool.” Billy repeated the words back, flatly, tinged with a dry layer of sarcasm, but as far as Steve was concerned that was just *how Billy sounded*, so he didn't let that flounder him. He nodded earnestly, instead.

“Yeah, uhm, you know, since your car is in the shop.”

“Right.”

“So, like, someone will pick you up around 6:00am.”

Billy kept staring. Steve watched his upper lip curl back before it set into a thin line. He shrugged, after. “Great. I'll pay it forward when she's out of the shop.” Billy's tone was almost wistful. Steve felt kinda bad for him, but he knew that kind of sympathy was probably a punch in the face waiting to happen.

“Cool... Cool. Ok, see yah,” he called out to the back of Billy's head as the other man stepped out of the car. He got a slightly backwards wave as he watched him jog towards the house to get out of the rain.

Oh geeze. What had he done?

"Oh-Shit!" Nancy popped her thumb into her mouth and sucked on the little red heat blister forming to ease the pain. She and Steve had both come to an agreement years ago that whoever got home first would figure out dinner. It had led to quite a few late nights for them both, at the office, in an ultimate showdown because, well...

They were *both* awful cooks. Terrible. All she had been trying to do was pull a chicken pot pie out of the oven, and her thumb still throbbed as a beacon to her failure at domesticity.

Nancy wasn't really sure what either of them did could even count as cooking. There were no recipes, just a lot of frozen dinner trays in their life. One time, Steve had tried to roast a chicken in a fit of delusion, and they'd needed to call the fire department.

They'd given up and resigned themselves to a life of high sodium. They tried to make up for it by serving salads with their meals, or an apple or banana. That had to count for something. Her mother had offered to teach her, but, well, she really didn't want to. They were so busy that she didn't want to sacrifice what little free time she had to learn. And maybe, she would admit only to herself, a little part of her rebelled at the idea of being the housewife living in suburbia who welcomed her husband home with a home cooked meal.

Swanson was just fine. Steve never complained, and she didn't, either, when it was his turn. Besides, the salisbury steak wasn't that bad.

The front door was opening, and the footsteps into the kitchen made her turn. She pushed out her thumb into Steve's face, her lips pursed

into a little frown.

“Hey, Nance, oh, again?” She nodded, and Steve made the appropriately sympathetic noise she was waiting for. He took her hand in his, and the little kiss he delivered to her thumb pad mollified her more than an ice cube could.

“Thanks. The pot pie is kinda really brown on top, but I think it's ok,” Nancy offered, her tone more confident than she really felt as she turned back to the counter to puncture the brown, very brown, shell. It crunched suspiciously under her knife. She'd had to scrape a little char off the edges, earlier ... Just a little. She'd gotten distracted going over a few numbers on their books. When she tried to pull the knife back, it... stuck. She wasn't sure she was going to be getting it back from the inedible block of glue she'd breached just past the crust.

Speaking of distracted, Steve hadn't answered her. She started to turn around, but squeaked instead when his long arms wrapped around her middle, and he rested his forehead on her shoulder. He groaned, long and drawn out, and she pressed her lips together to hold back a giggle. She reached up to rub the top of his head instead, little fingers slipping into silky hair and massaging his scalp until he switched over to a pleased moan.

“What's wrong?” she asked, suspecting it wasn't the pot pie. Well, not yet.

Steve's words were muffled against her shoulder. “Babe, I did something dumb, and then another thing dumb, and now I have to make a company carpool happen before Monday.”

Lucky for them both, Nancy was well versed in 'Harrington'. "Ok, well... We can do that. But, maybe you should tell me why, first?" she suggested, her fingers still running soothingly over his scalp. His sigh tickled her neck, and when she tried to scrunch away, he pulled her back against his tall frame more. He pecked a little kiss at the side of her throat before finally speaking again.

"Ok, but it's going to sound worse before it gets better." Steve drew in a deep breath and Nancy took the opportunity to wriggle around in his grip to face him.

"Go ahead, I'm listening," she promised seriously. Knowing Steve, this could be nothing or everything, and there was just no way of knowing before he managed to get the entire story out.

"Billy Hargrove came to the site, today, and I gave him a job, and a ride home—I don't think he has a car, Nance—and I kinda told him we had a carpool, because I felt bad. But we definitely don't have a carpool. I mean you and me drive in together a lot, but a carpool that does not make..."

Nancy tilted her head once he sounded like he was finished. *Billy Hargrove?* That was surprising. She honestly hadn't thought about the boy in years. He'd never really done anything to her, personally, but she could remember well enough the broken face Steve had come home with after keeping Billy away from the kids. Her brows furrowed, but she bit back any thoughts on it, yet, trying to stay neutral. "Okay... Why did you give Billy Hargrove a job?"

"I think... I think he really needs one." Steve's voice went a touch

softer, and that was that. Steve had seen someone in need, and reached out. She didn't have to know any more about it, really.

Nancy wasn't one to believe Steve Harrington had changed his life just because of her. She wasn't his babysitter, she was his wife, and she liked to believe that he would have changed on his own, even without her. But it was nice to have been there with him during it, to see him go from egotistical party boy to the brave, caring man she lay down with every night. Moments like those reminded her of just how much she cherished that.

"Ok," she agreed, and laid her head on his chest, listening to his heartbeat as she thought about the current situation and what they could do.

"Ok... You're not mad, right?" Steve's hands were just barely on the small of her back now, almost hovering nervously. She smiled and shook her head.

"You wanted to help someone who needed it." She hummed when his hands finally rested warmly against her sweater and rubbed slowly up her spine. "We'll figure out what to do about a carpool... But we should eat dinner, first."

"Yeah." Steve sounded relieved. "Thanks, Nance..." He looked over her shoulder at the pot pie, silent for a few long moments before he pulled back to look at her, his expression pained. Her own brows rose in innocence. Like she had absolutely no idea what could be wrong.

"Uh..."

“Yes?”

“That's...” he started, voice trailing off. “Thank you for, uhm, cooking but...”

“KFC?”

“KFC.”

The weekend had gone by quick. Billy ran a few side jobs, got together enough cash for a good pair of steel toed boots, since losing a foot wasn't exactly an option. He also got enough together to put gas in Sue's car and borrow it to go see a doctor out of town, someone who he could lie to and say he didn't have any medical records in the area, that he could convince he was just fine to be signed off on as fit to work.

He knew the doctor's office at Hawkins wasn't exactly going to sign off on it, even if he was fucking fine. Something about having been stabbed through the heart by a supernatural rage monster made them think he shouldn't do much heavy lifting. Whatever.

This was going to work. Billy felt better than he had in a while. Sue had smiled when he'd told her he'd found something steady, something full time. She'd told him she was proud of him, and Billy had quickly gone to bed with a curt 'thanks' because hearing those

words from her had made his chest ache and his eyes go a little blurry.

By the time Monday rolled around, he was up early, teeth brushed, hair pulled back, pills downed, and ready to go. He just needed...

“Max! Have you seen the—” Billy stopped when Max shoved the old thermos he’d been looking for across the kitchen table towards him. Her nose hadn’t left her book. There was a biology final exam she was cramming for. He knew because she’d begged him to read her flashcards to her. He’d done it lying back on the couch until he’d fallen asleep with a paper note card over his eyes.

“Filled it with the rest of the coffee.” Her tone was distracted as she flipped the page.

“Shouldn’t drink that shit, squirt. You’ll stunt your growth.” Billy grinned at her little scoff. They both knew she wasn’t going to be growing another inch either way. She finally peered over her bio book to look up at him.

“Yeah, well you’re not supposed to drink it either, you know... Hey, Billy, there’s this spot open at the gas station. I was thinking maybe since school is letting out soon—”

“Nah-ah.” Billy cut her off as he slapped together a peanut butter on somewhat questionable bread and shoved it into a paper bag. First paycheck, he was grocery shopping. They’d been living off instant food because it was cheaper, but he kinda missed cooking. Neil had expected him to fix dinner for Max when he and Sue were out, and it

was one of the few chores he hadn't really minded.

“Billy—”

“Hey, what'd I say?” he snapped, tone more irritable. “You ain't working just to pay bills around here. That's final.”

“I want to help!” Max set her book down. “It would only be a few hours a day, but it could help.”

Billy sighed, trying not to get pissed. They were both hard headed enough to get into a screaming match over the dumbest shit. “Max, look. I appreciate it, your mom does, too. But if you want to get a summer job, then that cash is *yours*. We ain't taking any of it. The new job I got... It's gonna be really good, ok?” He walked over and ruffled her hair, ignoring her annoyed squawk. She was getting too old for this, and neither of them really cared. They'd missed out on a lot of ‘little sister’ years because he was too busy being a douchebag. They were making up for it, now.

“Knock it off.” Max smoothed her hair, scowling up at him before she finally registered his words. “Wait, is it really? *Really*, really?”

“Really, really, really,” Billy answered with a snort. “I don't want you to worry about things. When's Susan getting back? She gonna be able to take you to school?” Sue was the only one with a car, and she was usually able to run a split shift and run Max to school if the weather was bad.

“Nah, but I'm biking with Lucas today.” Billy just nodded. Max and

Lucas were so on again off again that he just let her tell him what the situation was when he needed to know. He didn't mind it, they were still teens, it didn't surprise him, and, once he'd got his head out of his ass... unlearned a lot of the toxic bullshit he'd let fester in him... he'd realized the kid was alright. They weren't friends. He wasn't about to be friends with his little sister's boyfriend on general principle. But he was alright, had hung out with them both on occasion when he was over, and had maybe helped him score weed for them both a few times.

“Alright, watch out, might rain again.”

“Wait! How are you going to work? Where is it? How much are you getting paid? What are you going to do?” Max kept going, and Billy definitely ignored her, justified when he heard a car horn outside.

“Mind your business, get to class, ok?” he shouted over his shoulder, grabbing his bagged lunch and hustling out the door.

His steps slowed down as he made it down the gravel driveway, and he stopped in front of a beamer that was starting to get a little familiar. His brows arched downward. He shoulda known that carpool thing was just some sort of pity from Harrington. And he sure as shit wasn't something to pity. He put his hands over the driver's window and leaned down, lips pressed tight together and ready to tell Steve to keep on driving, he'd figure it out, when he noticed two other guys sitting in the back, lunch pails jammed between the seats, one working on a take away cup of coffee.

Oh. Billy was too surprised to say anything else. He had the situation pegged wrong, and now he was leaning down too close into Steve's personal space as the other man rolled down the window to look at

him. He looked sleepy, but a little wide eyed as he looked up at Billy, not expecting the proximity.

“Uh, hey. Morning, Billy. You want a bagel?” he offered.

“A bagel.” Billy repeated the word, not really comprehending it.

“Yeah, dough, bread, cream cheese, I think like salt or, yeast, maybe?” Steve stated the words slowly, and Billy heard the popping mechanism on the passenger door. “Jerry brought them.”

Who the fuck was Jerry? Billy decided he didn't care. It was too early for this. He walked around the car and slipped into the passenger seat, and, sure enough, lifted a box of bagels out of the way. He ate two on the way to the construction site because, free food. Along the way, Steve introduced him to the other two riders. Jerry, obviously, and Shawn or something. Honestly, Billy didn't pay attention.

Nancy had been his savior on the carpool. She'd made some calls that weekend, made it sound like an idea they were just floating around as a company perk. Honestly, it kinda was a good idea, in general, even if he hadn't come up with it intentionally. He knew some of the guys split vehicles or hitched rides. By the time she was done, Nancy had proudly held up a rotating schedule which notably did not have Billy as one of the drivers.

When he dropped off Billy and the rest of the guys, Billy had

muttered a gruff thanks and disappeared into the crowd of men laughing and making their way to the site. And that was kinda that. He didn't see much of Billy beyond a few glimpses as he made some rounds. His blonde hair stuck out in a crowd even when he'd pulled it back into a ponytail under his hard hat to work. What he saw seemed promising. Billy had been leaning in close, listening intently to their master welder, clearly willing to learn.

Nancy had come into the office an hour or so later, carrying an armful of the blueprints he knew she'd been going over all morning before she even stepped foot into the office. She was definitely one of those people that took her work home with her. It was why he often pushed her to go home earlier than he would, otherwise she'd *never* stop working. Steve got up to help her set down the blueprints, and got a kiss for his troubles. Which turned into another, and then another as he settled his hands on the small of her back.

"Mmph," Nancy laughed, voice muffled by his lips before she gave in and took another kiss. "Hey, mister, I've been going over these blueprints for the new bids an—Steve!" Her voice hissed out into a squeak as his hand snuck down to her ass. He couldn't help it, they'd been so busy lately, and she was right there, and always looked so sexy when she had her hair up for work.

"Come on," Steve encouraged. He leaned closer to kiss that little spot behind her ear that he knew tickled and drove her a little wild. A triumphant grin pulled at his lips when he heard her breathy exhale. He considered himself preeeetty good at seducing his wife. One might call him an expert.

"Come on, there's time," he coaxed, kissing down her throat as her slender arms wrapped around him. He loved when her fingers sank into his hair and gripped, and he nosed past the pale blue blouse she

was wearing so he could just barely kiss the little peek of skin there above her collarbone. “We both know you’ll take all of this home with you no matter *how* much we work today.”

“Ooh, I hate that you’re right.” Nancy laughed breathlessly and he laughed with her.

“Come on, just a little something to take your mind off—” Steve didn’t even get the sentence out, Nancy was too busy tugging him back up into another kiss. She hopped back to sit on the edge of the desk, and Steve pushed her legs apart, ran his hands up her thighs, and pushed past her pencil skirt so he could cup her through her panties. She was already so warm, and the shivery gasp against his lips went straight to his dick.

“God, you’re so pretty. You’re beautiful, Nancy,” Steve whispered in an awed rush. He rubbed his thumb against the damp cloth covering her sex, feeling her lips, how the slide of his thumb got a little easier, wetter as Nancy gasped again and squirmed. Her legs bracketed his, tight, like she dared him to try and escape, and he loved that, there was never any question of what Nancy wanted from him. Her own hands went to her blouse, unbuttoning it enough to expose the small swell of her breasts so she could tug on the back of Steve’s head. Her nails scraped over his scalp, sending another tinge of heat through his body as he tongued over her nipples, nibbling the soft skin there until it pebbled and Nancy had started to buck her hips impatiently, trying to ride his thumb to completion.

“Come on, come on, not yet,” Steve whispered out in a pant, moaning when her hands gripped harder, tugging at his scalp.

“Then *hurry*.” Nancy couldn’t keep still, didn’t hold back an impatient

whine when Steve had to stop playing with her pussy so he could tug her panties down and out of the way. It happened fast after that, Steve barely remembered fumbling with his pants before Nancy's hands were on his cock, helping him line up. He moaned out quietly with her, watched her head fall back and her back arch as he pushed inside, all sticky wet, welcoming heat enveloping him and making his world tilt into something hazy and perfect. She hadn't stopped making him feel like a horny teenager, yet, and he honestly hoped she never would. He never wanted to stop feeling like this with her.

After, they cleaned up with a few tissues, and Nancy sighed, leaning her head on Steve's shoulder even though she'd had time to catch her breath. She knew she'd be too weak in the knees to move for a few minutes still. Steve was such a bad influence. They really had to stop having sex in the office. She'd told herself this already, a dozen times, and she honestly didn't see anything changing. She smiled and rubbed her hands over his arms, putting the idea out of her head. "Did things go ok, today?"

"What, with the carpool?" Steve nodded, managing to fasten his pants again without pulling away from her embrace. "It was great. Thank you, again." He reached to button her blouse, and she leaned back to let him, looking up at his face and enjoying seeing it focused in concentration on the simple act. He always tried so hard for her, even with the little things.

"Sure, hey, I was thinking..." She reached up to smooth his hair just so back into place. It always went less wild than hers during sex, but then, he used more hair spray than she did. "Maybe we could invite him to movie night with the kids?"

“Who... Wait, Billy? Really?” That finally had him looking up from her buttons. “Why?”

“Well, I just thought it might be nice.” She shrugged. They'd been trying to do movie nights with her little brother and the whole gang at least once a month. It was a fun time, a wild time, but a fun time. “I mean, we don't have to, but it's not like Max doesn't already come. We could just let her know Billy can come, too, if he wants.”

She truly wasn't sure where the idea came from. She didn't exactly have much lost love for Billy Hargrove. But it felt right, and Nancy always made an effort to follow her whims when they felt right. They usually led her to trouble, first, but eventually the right path.

“I don't know... Maybe?” Steve's voice had a questioning tone to it, like he wasn't really sure, himself. “I mean, I doubt he'd want to come, though. I don't exactly think it's his scene. He's probably going to every party in Hawkins, still, and doing keg stands at them all.” Steve snorted.

Nancy laughed. “You know, I bet people would have thought the same thing of you, a while ago.” She slipped off the desk to find her panties and tuck them away for now in her purse, since they were ruined until she had time to wash them. “But people change, right?”

“I guess... I mean, yeah, you're right.” Steve nodded after a clear moment of thought. “Why not, right? Not like we have to keep inviting him, if it's weird.”

“Of course not. Do you want me to invite him?” Nancy offered. She

hadn't seen Billy yet, on the premises, and honestly, she was a little curious.

"Sure, you or Max. I'm not doing it. You should have seen this morning. I think he thought it was just me picking him up, and he didn't look too happy about it... Wait, maybe it's not a good idea." Steve frowned. "Billy isn't really the kind of guy who likes sympathy, Nance."

"Sympathy? This isn't sympathy," she assured him. She leaned up onto her toes so she could kiss his cheek. "It's an olive branch. Trust me, ok?"

"If you say so... I mean sure, of course I do." Steve floundered quickly at the amused look she gave him. "I mean... I love you," he added for good measure. Nancy wanted to laugh, but she just took another kiss before she left the trailer with her purse slung over her shoulder.

The sun was warm out, the rain of last weekend forgotten. The weather couldn't make up its mind about what it wanted to do. Chilly and pouring last week, and today the sun was beating down enough that a lot of the workers had stripped down to their jeans and hard hats to cool off when they could get away with it on their lunch break. She got a few curious looks, having donned a hard hat, herself, to be out in the area. She knew a lot of the workers by name, she'd made a point of it early on. She'd found that if they knew she knew just who they were, and looked them in the eyes as she talked to them, that their own eyes were less likely to wander downwards.

Finding Billy wasn't hard. The only surprise was that he actually had a shirt on. That was the first indicator that maybe he'd changed a bit. Last she knew, Hargrove didn't actually know what a button was, let

alone a t-shirt. His hair was pulled back, and there was a welding mask resting on his knee as he sat on some nearby crates, working on his lunch.

“Hi, Billy,” Nancy called out from a short distance, to get his attention. She watched him squint before recognition lit over his face.

“Hey, Wheeler! Or I guess it’s Harrington now, too, huh?” Billy asked, setting down his sandwich and brushing some crumbs off of his hands. He looked almost exactly how she remembered him from fleeting interactions at school and the occasional party. Same strong arms and solid frame. His smile was still mostly a smirk, full of mischief, but it seemed more genuine, like it actually reached his eyes, now. There didn’t seem to be the pent up bubble of danger just under his skin that had always sent off warning signs for her. Instead, it almost seemed to send a little zip of warmth through her chest, which was surprising, but easy to brush off.

“Actually... It’s still Wheeler,” Nancy told him, returning his smile politely. Steve had never really cared about her changing her last name, and she’d decided there was no reason to, at all. It had always seemed like such an outdated idea to her, anyway.

“Oh, really?” Billy tilted his head, seeming to take that in. “Good,” he decided. “Fits you more.”

“Thank you... I think,” Nancy mused, tilting her head back in return, not sure if that was meant as a compliment towards her or maybe a playful slight against Steve. “Well, I just wanted to say welcome aboard, here.”

“Yeah? Guess I have you to thank for that, too.” Billy nodded towards the construction site. “For giving me a chance at it.”

“That was all Steve.” Nancy made sure to give credit where it was due. “But I’m glad he did. Actually, we wanted to invite you over. I don’t know if you knew, but Max comes over with the rest of the gang every few weeks or so. We were thinking you could come over with her, this Friday?”

Movie night. Of course he knew about it. Max marked on the kitchen calendar every time there was a new one. She wasn’t one to make a big deal out of events, but it was clear she held it as sacred as a holiday. It honestly stunned Billy speechless to be getting an invitation. He cleared his throat, looking at Nancy, who was looking back expectantly.

“Not sure that’s a great idea,” he spoke finally. “I wouldn’t want to cramp Max’s style.” That was the honest truth. He wasn’t even sure he *wanted* to go, but he couldn’t imagine his kid sister wanting him to tag along, let alone any of her dweeby friends.

“Well... You could ask her if she minded,” Nancy said thoughtfully, not at all deterred. “I’d like you to come, Steve would, too. But no pressure,” She added. “Here... Max is terrible at remembering our phone number...” She took a step closer and set her purse down to open it up. She inhaled sharply and Billy quickly glanced down, catching a little peek of pink lace. Well, well, well. He almost laughed, in fact he barely held it in, but Nancy’s cheeks were bright red when she snapped her purse shut and straightened, holding out a card.

"This is... I wanted you to have our home number," she got out, flustered. "You can let us know, if you want to come and stuff."

"Sure." He drawled the word out slowly, looking her in those pretty blue eyes. She knew he'd seen, and he knew it. He wasn't going to say anything, but he couldn't help giving her a teasing grin as he reached out for the card. Good for her. "Tell Steve I said hi, huh?"

Her cheeks pinked a little more, and she sucked in a quick breath, seeming to gain her resolve again. "I will. And you really should come, ok?" She seemed to make up her mind and, well, she was a hell of a lot braver than he would have given her credit for, because embarrassed or not, she leaned in and gave him a quick little hug.

Billy was just as surprised by that as he was the open invitation. He held onto her for a second. There was no avoiding the fact that she was the nicest smelling thing in miles. Her perfume was soft in his nose, and he breathed in shamelessly, catching the slightest whiff of musk and sweat with it. Between that and the panty peek, he was sure Nancy had just come from a little rendezvous with her husband. He wondered how often they fucked in the office trailer. Good to know comedians were wrong and marriage didn't really kill one's sex life. He'd bet money that they looked hot as hell together.

He shook off the thought as he pulled back. "Thanks, I'll think about it," Billy lied. He'd meant what he'd said. He wasn't going to make things weird for Max, or himself, for that matter. It was kind of nice to be thought of, though.

By the time he got home that night, he just wanted to crash. He'd worked as late as he could and still get a ride home, and his body was aching. He rubbed a hand absently over his chest as he tossed his empty lunch bag and wallet on the table.

There were grocery bags on the counter, and the bubbling scent of marinara in the kitchen was making the windows fog. His stomach rumbled, and Billy almost smiled. Susan must have gotten a few more hours and a bigger paycheck than she was expecting. "Here, let me help," he offered, moving over towards the counter to pull out the box of pasta he assumed she planned on using, before he put away a few cans and bags of frozen vegetables. Between the two of them, they were pretty good about buying cheap and stretching out the ingredients.

"Oh, Billy, you don't have to do that." Susan gratefully took the box out of his hands. "You've been working all day."

"So have you, it's only fair, come on." He waived her off, convincing her to let him finish putting away the groceries while she cooked. By the time he was done, he was able to walk out to the living room, swirling spaghetti onto a fork and shoveling it into his mouth. Max was already there, and he was happy to see she was taking a break and watching TV, but she was taking up the whole damn couch so he nudged her with his boot until she shrieked and kicked his leg then slid over.

"You could just *ask*, like a regular human," she muttered, and grabbed for the bowl of spaghetti he'd brought out for her.

“Yeah, yeah. How was the test?”

“Pretty good, I think. Work?”

“Pretty good, too, I think.”

Max nodded and leaned back. They ate mostly in silence, watching The Golden Girls. He looked over at her after he'd scraped his bowl clean. She caught him after a few moments, and scrunched her nose up.

“What?”

“Nothing, just... Figured I'd tell you I got a job working for Harrington,” Billy finally said. He wasn't sure why that was so damn hard to cop to. Maybe because he knew he really didn't deserve the offer from the guy. He could look at Max right now and remember exactly what it felt like to split Harrington's lip open on his knuckles. Maybe even with their own reconciliation, he thought Max would be upset that he was anywhere around someone she considered a friend. Billy might have toned it down, but he knew he was still an asshole.

Max tilted her head thoughtfully. “Huh. That's probably weird, right?”

“Totally,” he agreed with a quick nod. “But you're ok with it?”

“Well, sure.” She shrugged. “If he’s fine with it, I am. And like, it’s not like he would hire you if he wasn’t.”

“Sure, yeah,” Billy agreed quickly, trying not to show how relieved that easy dismissal of the situation made him. “Felt so fine with it they invited me to that little movie night thing,” he added, just for good measure, feeling the need to assure her further without really thinking about it. “Not that I’m going or nothing.”

“Really? Wait, how come?”

“Come on, why would I. That’s more you and the other dorks’ thing. Not mine.”

“Billy.” Max shook her head, her tone exasperated. “You don’t really have ‘things’, anymore. You haven’t gone out in forever besides to work.”

“Well shit, ok *mom*.” Billy snorted, trying to ignore just how damn right she was. He couldn’t even remember the last time he’d had a beer, let alone partied. That shit cost money, and it just hadn’t seemed worth it. Most partying he did these days was the occasional splurge on a dime bag of weed, which he’d smoke in his room and just relax. Forget things for a while.

“I mean it, you should come.”

“Nah.”

“Come ooooon.” Max whined *just* because she knew just how much it grated on his nerves.

“Just shut *uuuuupppp*,” he whined shamelessly back, stopping and unable to bite back a grin when he heard a soft laugh from Susan, in the kitchen. “You don’t really want me to go to this shit, right? It’ll cramp your style.”

“Nope! Nice try. I’ll always be too cool for you to ruin,” she retorted back happily. “You don’t have to go, but you should. It’s fun. Maybe you’d remember what that’s like, if you try.”

“Alright, alright, shut up.” Billy ruffled her hair up until she squawked and tried to grab his wrists. “I’ll think about it, ok? No promises.”

“I can’t believe you showed him your underwear, Nance.” They’d both showered off the day, and Steve was laying across their bed, grinning at her as he watched her brush her hair before bed through the open bathroom door.

“For the last time, it was an accident!” Nancy’s giggling made her indignation seem less sincere, but no less true. She’d relayed the entire event to him, bemoaning the incident while Steve assured her that Billy probably totally hadn’t seen because she demanded he lie to

her about it. She finally set down the brush and walked into the bedroom. She'd pulled on one of his old t-shirts, and that always made him a little grabby. He was tired, they really had to sleep, but he loved to hold onto her and feel her bare thighs sliding against his.

"Sure, sure. I knew I made a mistake hiring him. He's too hot," Steve jokingly complained as he pulled her up close to him on the bed. His hand ran down her thigh, so soft it made him sigh and nose over her cheek. "He's gonna steal you away, for sure." Nancy giggled, and Steve did the same right along with her. It was good, to be able to joke about this kind of stuff, now. It wasn't just the ring. It was the knowledge of how much Nancy loved him, how much they both meant to each other.

"He *is still* kinda pretty hot, though." Nancy was still laughing, and Steve wasn't helping by tickling the backs of her thighs ruthlessly, making her wriggle. "Stooooop. I'm just being honest!" She covered her face with her hands.

"Yeah, yeah. Believe me, I know it." Steve shook his head and spooned her to him more. "Haven't seen his shirt off, but he's probably still got the same ridiculous body under it," he agreed, not bothered by the admittance. Water was wet, Billy Hargrove was objectively sexy, those were kind of just facts of life.

"It's pretty ridiculous," Nancy agreed, yawning and wiggling back. It was super early, but they were both tired. They'd eaten KFC leftovers, and had decided to just curl up and call it a night.

"Super ridiculous." Steve nodded, for good measure. He exhaled a deep sigh, just about to turn off the lights, when the shrill ring of the phone on the nightstand went off.

“Nooooo,” Nancy complained, pulling her pillow over her head.

“Don't worry, I've got it, I've got it.” Steve laughed and stretched out over her to grab the phone.

“Steve, you're squishing me!”

“Yeah, but you love it.” He laughed down at her indignant face as he put the phone to his ear. “Harrington-Wheeler residence.” Steve smiled at the playful tap to his nose the new greeting got.

“Hey, Steve, I interrupting something?”

The voice over the phone was amused, but tinny sounding enough over the connection that it took him a pause to process. “Oh, hey, Billy?” he guessed, surprised, and almost a little guilty. They'd just been discussing how hot the guy was, after all. Was he psychic or something? Oh god, what if that had *stayed* behind, like El had, and he'd been listening somehow... No, that was crazy.

Steve shook off the thought, looking down at Nancy who looked surprised by the call, too. “No, something up? You going to be able to come in tomorrow?”

“Yeah, ‘course. Nancy had just asked me to call to let her know if I was coming Friday...” There was a long pause, and Steve wasn't sure

if the call had dropped. "...Long as that was ok with you both? Wasn't sure if I should bring anything."

"Oh. Oh yeah! Of course, Nancy said she invited you," Steve hastened to reply. "Bring anything?" He repeated the words back and looked at Nancy questioningly. She shook her head so he answered, "No, just like, you. Actually, you could just ride home from work with one of us," he realized as he spoke. "Max usually bikes."

"Sure."

It was hard to tell Billy's tone over the phone, so Steve didn't try to decipher it. He just bid the other man a hasty goodnight, and told him he'd talk to him later. He hung up and finally unsquished Nancy, who breathed out and pushed his shoulder.

"He's coming, then?"

"Yeah, sounds it."

3. Chapter 3

The rest of the week was fairly uneventful. Well, there was an accident on site, Steve had managed to accidentally lock them both out of the house, and they'd spent Wednesday night having a very serious debate on whether or not they were too busy for a kitten... but on the Billy front, it was quiet.

Steve caught a few glances of him at work, and had paused to give a wave. Nancy had ended up driving the carpool twice, and said both times had gone well. Billy didn't seem to be much of morning person, though, because he was pretty quiet for them. By the time Friday ticked around, they were both looking forward to their get-together.

"It's a shame it's too rainy for the pool. We have our own certified lifeguard coming," Nancy joked as she sat at the vanity. She'd just finished pinning up her hair. Steve watched fondly as she spritzed on a little cloud of 'Dior Poison'. She loved their work, but she didn't really like smelling like a construction site, and he knew she kept a smaller bottle in her purse to touch up throughout the day.

"You're right. Wonder if he still has the trunks," Steve joked back. "Hey, you don't think we have to like... do more than pizza and soda do you?"

"Well, I have popcorn and candy for the movies, too. Why?"

"I don't know..." Steve's voice trailed off slowly. "Maybe it's dumb, but I realized last night that Billy is like the only 'grown up' we've had over."

“Steve, we’re grownups. Jon and Robin have been over, too!” Nancy’s laughter was against his ear as she stood to hug her arms around him.

“Well, yeah, I know. I just mean... We’ve been friends with them all for forever, and let’s face it, with them moving out of town, lately we’ve only hosted teenagers. You know?”

Nancy patted her hands on his chest and tilted her head as she thought about it. “I guess you’re right. I don’t think he’s expecting anything fancy for dinner, but there’s no reason we can’t pick up some beer for us.”

“We’ll hid them from the teen brigade.” Steve smiled and looped his arm around her for a quick squeeze before they left for work.

Billy’s feet and back were aching, but he’d made it through his first week, and he could admit to himself that he was feeling pretty proud. It hadn’t hurt that he’d found out Steve didn’t hold paychecks for the first week of work like a lot of places did. He walked out of the envelope pick-up line and sucked in a quick, pleased breath when he saw the numbers written there. He hadn’t realized how much overtime they’d been letting him put in. It was the biggest chunk of money he’d seen in a long time, and he was already picturing groceries and catching up on a few things, maybe a little extra cash for Max at the arcade.

“Billy!” a voice called out, and he looked up, tucking the envelope into his inner coat pocket. He spotted Nancy leaning a little out of her car window and waving him closer. Right, movie night. He’d been so busy he’d almost forgotten. He jogged quietly over to the car. Steve was in the passenger seat, and he popped the lock for the back door.

“Going our way?”

Billy snorted. Cornball. He shook his head and ignored how pleased Steve looked with himself. “Thanks.” He kept the gratitude clipped and curt. It was still a flavor he wasn’t used to putting in his mouth.

Carpool all week had been crowded. It was nice to just stretch out in their backseat and enjoy being off his feet. He watched when Steve reached over to fiddle with the radio. He was surprised when his favorite radio station was suddenly coming through the speakers. He didn’t know Steve liked it, too. It was kinda hard to get the right frequency in. He usually had to give his radio a good love tap.

“Billy?” Nancy was looking back at him from the rear view mirror when they reached a stop sign. “What kind of pizza do you like?”

Billy flashed her reflection a smile. “Anything without olives.”

“Hah!” Nancy leaned to bump into Steve’s shoulder. “You and Dustin are far outnumbered.”

Steve's hands went up in defeat. "Hey, I just said we could *check* to see if he liked it."

"Come on, don't tell me you actually eat that shit, Harrington." Billy laughed and watched Steve pretend to grumble to himself.

"It's pretty good, ok? I'm fine with other things..."

"Sausage and mushroom is where it's at." Billy winked at Nancy in the mirror who caught it and laughed.

"Now you're talking."

Billy chuckled quietly and settled back. He knew vaguely where Steve lived. The rich as shit part of town, pool and all. His dad had always called the houses eyesores. Said no self respecting man would put up with any of that fancy shit. That they were probably all queers, and their wives were no better. His dad had never played off jealousy well.

The pool was covered, and there were bikes littering the driveway when Steve pulled in. Nancy groaned. "Mike biked, you know that means he failed his driving exam... again."

"Oh geeze." Steve shook his head. "How many times can you fail before they just... stop letting you try?"

“Steven!”

“I’m just *asking*. Billy, is Max learning yet?” Steve asked as he slid out of the car.

Billy shook his head. “Nah, we haven’t really talked about it yet.” Honestly, he hadn’t really even thought about it. There was only one car, and if Susan wasn’t using it, then Billy was. It had seemed almost cruel to bring it up... Now, if things were stable enough, it might be something to consider. “But when she does, I’m gonna make sure she rubs the license right in Mike’s face.” He smirked, surprised when Nancy was the first one to laugh. He was *her* brother, after all.

“Good. He sometimes needs a little humbling.” Nancy looked amused, shouldering her purse and walking them inside. The kids apparently knew to just let themselves in. He could hear noises from what he assumed would be the living room, and sure enough, when he was led there he could see the group of teens.

“Hey Billy!” Max had managed to snag a couch spot, and her fingers were in El’s hair, who was sitting in front of her on the carpet while they seemed to be trying out some sort of wild ponytail. El tipped her head up to give Billy a quiet smile. She was the only one Billy spared a quick jerk of his head and a little smile for, besides his sister. There was a quiet solidarity there that both respected.

“What’s your brother doing here?” Dustin started to ask, sounding curious, but Steve cut him off to announce that he would now be taking bids for pizza toppings. Billy blinked in slow shock at the sudden flurry of activity as Steve started taking the bids like he’d seen auctioneers on tv.

“Can I see two, two hands for pepperoni, oh, I see three over here for sausage—”

“Jesus.” Billy stepped back a little, not at all about to get into any of that. He almost jumped when Nancy's hand went to his shoulder to get his attention.

“Come on, this gets crazy. How about a beer?”

“Hell yes.”

Nancy held back a laugh at Billy's expense. He'd looked a little like a deer caught in headlights. This wasn't the sort of house party he was probably used to going to, or had been. She led him into a quiet retreat towards the kitchen. “I could give you a little tour if you want?” she offered, going to the fridge to get out a few cold bottles.

“Maybe later. It's nice, though.” Billy glanced around the kitchen. “Big kitchen.”

“It's wasted on us,” Nancy admitted, handing over a bottle. Their fingers brushed at the glass neck, and they both paused. It felt like such a party cliché that they both looked at each other, amused, before Nancy laughed sheepishly, drawing her hand back and sliding her hair behind her ear. “Neither of us cook.”

“Shame. Bet you could get something really good going in here,” Billy remarked.

Nancy nodded. “Oh, here, I’ll get the bottle opener.”

“Nah. I’ve got it.” Nancy watched as Billy slid the bottle under one of the rings on his finger, snapping his hand up with a quick flick. Sure enough, there was the hiss of the bottle releasing, and Billy came away with the empty cap. “Give me yours.”

“That’s one way to do it.” Nancy held hers out for him. “Gosh, that’s a better party trick than what we used to do in high school.” She laughed. “Stabbing the cans with pocket knives and chugging them down.”

Billy laughed with her. “Yeah, I used to pull it out a lot,” he admitted. “Never tried the can thing, though.”

“Right, you were more keg stands,” she mused. Billy flashed her a little smirk before his lips went to his beer bottle.

“Got that right.”

Nancy ended up leaned back against the opposite counter from Billy by the time Steve joined them. They’d been chatting and sipping beers, and, honestly, it was nice. Billy liked to cook, and he was currently trying to convince her that even she could make spaghetti, and Nancy was very certain she couldn’t. But it was a fun argument.

“Hey, didn’t know the party was out here, too.” Steve took a sip of her beer when she handed it to him. “Finally figured out pizza toppings. No olives, promise.” He smiled at her, and Nancy couldn’t resist leaning up on her toes to give him a little kiss. He always looked adorably excited when they had company over.

“Great. Give me the list, I’ll call it in.”

The rest of the night was a wild blur. She tried to play good hostess since Billy was new to the party, but she got swept up in things. She checked on him a few times, saw him mostly hanging around Max and El during the movie. Then Lucas was wiping the floor with all of them at Pictionary, and she had to take a beer out of her little brother’s hand. By the time she was saying goodbyes and sending everyone home with leftover pizza, she realized she’d lost track of him entirely, barely getting a goodbye in before Steve went to drive him home along with anyone else who wanted a ride.

“Do you think he had a good time?” Nancy asked Steve when he was home and they were able to collapse onto the bed together. Movie night was a great time, but thank god they could sleep in a little tomorrow.

“Who, Billy? Yeah, I think so. I mean, I didn’t really get to talk to him much. Think you did, more than me.” He appreciated Nancy being sure the other man was included. He’d felt kinda bad that he hadn’t really had a chance to talk to him much in the chaos.

“Dustin hogs you,” Nancy teased. She was wearing another one of

Steve's old t-shirts and putting her cold toes against his legs to warm them.

"Hey, I hog Dustin." Steve laughed, his tone proud. "But yeah, I didn't talk to him much. He seemed like he had a good time on the ride home, though. Tired maybe," he added. "Do you think maybe... would it be crazy to... like, invite him over again?"

"I didn't want to be the crazy one who suggested it first." Nancy tucked her nose against his collarbone.

"No, no, hey, no hiding. Seriously? Are we really doing this?" Steve was laughing as he tipped her head up and made her face him. "I mean it is kinda crazy, right?"

"Well... I mean, it could be fun? We barely hang out with anyone our own age, anymore," Nancy reasoned, and she was right. Jonathan was always away traveling for his photography shoots, Robin had moved to Paris the first chance she'd gotten, and he honestly hadn't kept up with almost anyone else from high school. Geeze, did he not have any friends around anymore that weren't teens? Embarrassing.

"Let's do it."

"Ok," Nancy agreed and leaned in closer to give him a quick kiss. "But I invited him to this. So that means it's your turn."

"Really? Shit."

Steve waited until Tuesday. He figured first day back at work sounded too eager, but waiting too late meant Billy might have other plans. He definitely wasn't over thinking this. He was just casually making his way out into the construction zone, smiling and nodding in greeting at a couple of the guys. He got along pretty well with most of his crew. Half of them were still there from when his dad had been around, and if they'd stuck around, he figured he couldn't be doing too bad of a job.

"Hey, Billy!" Steve called, waving his arm to get his attention. He'd waited until lunch time so that he didn't have the risk of interrupting anything dangerous, and he could spot the other man in the crowd. He'd ordered pizza for the crew today on a whim since they'd gotten a deadline out faster than even he had expected. He tried to show how much he appreciated them making the company look good.

Billy spotted him and walked over, slice of pizza still in his hand. He cracked a small smile, and gave him a quick 'hey boss' before he bit into it, still watching him. The title distracted Steve a little. It still felt weird for Billy to be calling him that, but he shook it off and gave him his own smile in return. So far, so good... He decided to just launch right into it.

"I wanted to invite you to dinner sometime." Steve cringed immediately at how much that sounded like he was trying to take Billy out for a date or something. The other man didn't seem to notice, though. He just seemed to process it and nod. Steve liked the little smile that graced his pink lips after his tongue dipped out to lick some pizza sauce off the corner of his mouth. "I mean, not like, just me. Nancy, too. We. We wanted to invite you to dinner. Like, maybe this Friday?"

“Yeah?” Billy finally spoke, which was for the best, because Steve was out of steam. “That could be good. I’ll let Max know.”

“Oh... Actually, honestly, we were thinking just us grown-ups,” Steve explained. “Like. Grown-up dinner. Well... We probably won’t actually cook, because that would be cruel. But like. Sit down, eat dinner... food thing. Just us three... If you wanted to?”

“...Oh, yeah?” Billy looked surprised then, and Steve couldn’t help but feel a little flustered as he seemed to think it over. This was a bad idea, this was a bad idea...

“I could cook.”

“Huh?”

“In your kitchen,” Billy clarified, finishing his slice and wiping his hands clean on his jeans. “Nancy showed me around it. I could cook something there.”

“Oh! Oh, yeah, sure.” Steve bobbed his head quickly in surprised agreement. “Yeah, that actually sounds great,” he added more enthusiastically when he thought about it. “I didn’t know you could cook.”

“Most people can, you know?” Billy replied dryly, his lips curling into a sardonic smirk. “Like, at least learn to boil some noodles or something, Harrington.”

"Ah, come on. We *try*." Steve laughed in spite of himself, scratching the back of his head. "So like... If you tell us what to get, we can at least buy the ingredients before you come. Fair's fair and all?"

"Fair is fair?"

"Oh yeah, like Nancy and I just say that a lot. Since we try to keep things even with work and household things. Like, what's fair is fair?" That was a thing people said right...What if it wasn't?

Billy looked amused. "Sure. Fair's fair," he repeated it back to him. "I'll drop off a grocery list by office trailer." He jerked his head back towards the crew when he heard the whistle blow. "Getting back, now."

"Oh, yeah..." Steve lifted his hand up to wave, then decided that was probably not cool, so he just held it in the air for a second before dropping it. "Uh, see yah."

Steve Harrington was still kind of an idiot. Billy mused over the thought as he got back to work. Had to hand it to him, though, his crew loved both him and Nancy. He'd heard from some of the lifers that, 'sad as it was to see his pops go', they were a lot happier now with those two running the show. That Nancy was no pushover, and that Steve was a good guy. Understood if an emergency came up, made sure to reward good effort, and rumor had it the Christmas bonuses could be pretty sweet.

He hadn't offered to cook just to impress his bosses, though. Honestly, he really wasn't sure *why* he had offered, but it had been out of his mouth before he'd really thought it over, and he wasn't about to take it back now. Whatever. He'd throw something together for them. They couldn't cook, so it wasn't like they could be picky. He decided by the time it was quitting time that he wasn't going to agonize over picking a meal.

"Billy, why are you on the kitchen floor?"

Billy looked up from where he sat, surrounded by a pile of cookbooks Susan kept in the bottom cupboard. Several were half open and stuck on possible recipes, and he had one perched on his knee. He felt pretty caught about it, so he bristled back defensively. "Reading. What's it look like? We gotta take you to the eye doctor again?"

"Shut up." Max pushed a little on his head to move him out of the way of the fridge door. "Want some juice?"

"Yeah," Billy murmured, turning the page on the book. It was some French cooking book, way too fucking fancy. Or was it? He assumed Steve and Nancy were eating pizza and Chinese food every night, but they had money. Maybe they were spending it on fancy catering instead of turning on the stove. Max nudged the cool glass of orange juice against Billy's cheek until he finally reached up for it and took a long drink. He set it back down beside his knee with a nod of thanks.

"Hey, squirt. What's your favorite thing I cook?"

“Aw, Billy, my birthday is months away,” Max teased, pressing her lips together into a mockingly sweet smile.

“Funny, funny.” Billy snorted and pushed her hip so she couldn’t see him smile. “Come on. Just tell me.”

Max made an annoyed huff as she drank, pushing at his hand. “Fine, your meatloaf and mashed potatoes.”

“Really? That’s it?” That was like the easiest thing he made. He’d been throwing it together for so long that it was second nature now. No recipe, just whatever was in the fridge that felt right at the time and, when they were lucky enough to be able to afford the real shit, heaps of butter in the mash. It kinda felt like cheating, it was so simple. He was into that.

“Yeah, like, even when you were a dick to me, I was always happy when you made it,” Max answered seriously. “Why, hey, what’s it for?” Her nose scrunched up with suspicion as Billy finally hauled himself off the floor and started putting books away, ignoring the question. “Come on, tell me.”

“Shut up, you’ve outworn your usefulness.” He laughed when she shoved at the small of his back, knocking him lightly into the counter. “Jesus, watch it there, MadMax,” he protested, knowing she had about as much chance of hurting him with the shove as an overexcited puppy.

“You gonna tell me?”

“Nah.” Billy turned around and looked down, sighing when she was

looking up at him with her best 'betrayed' eyes. Jesus. What kind of sucker was he now that those worked on him? Fucking domesticated.

“Fine. Steve and Nancy invited me over to dinner. Said I'd cook for them. You happy?”

“Oh... Really?” She drew her head back, surprised. “Weird. Have fun, I guess?”

“What? Why is it weird? Nevermind. Shut up. Don't answer that.” Billy held up his hand when she drew in a breath, ready to tell him every single thing that was *very* weird about that. He could think of half of them, himself. “I know it's weird. *You're* the one who wanted me to go out with them, remember?”

“Yeah, for *movie night.*”

“Well, it ain't my fault I'm so fucking charming I got invited back.”

“Yeah, *right.*” Max laughed, and walked with off with her juice to finally leave him in peace. He ended up tearing one of the little slips of paper from the pad on the fridge to make a list.

4. Chapter 4

It was Nancy's turn to do the shopping. She left work a bit earlier, and had the little handwritten list of scratchy writing paper clipped neatly beside the list she'd written herself as she walked down aisles she almost never touched. Meat section, vegetables, her mother would be proud. She dropped a bag of potatoes into the cart and wondered what Billy would be cooking. It really was a nice offer. She should have asked if she should get them something to drink with it. She'd probably get some pop, or maybe just some more beer to be safe.

She ended up finishing quickly enough, even with the added items, and pulled into the checkout lane.

“Nancy, hello,” Susan greeted her with a smile, which Nancy found herself returning easily. She didn't talk to Mrs. Hargrove much outside of the store, but she was often on-shift when Nancy checked out, and they often exchanged the usual pleasantries small town people did. She'd used to despise those kinds of things, so afraid of turning into her mother and falling into the same life she had, but now? She kind of enjoyed little moments like this. Little moments of being nice to people and discussing the weather didn't mean she was doomed to a life of playing housewife and cooking casseroles. She'd proven that. She couldn't cook for shit.

She talked to Susan about how all of the kids would be out for the summer soon, how it would be the holidays in no time. She asked about Max since she hadn't gotten much girl time with her last party. Susan was happy to discuss both as she rang in items.

“Nancy...” Susan looked up from putting a can of soup into a paper

bag. She glanced back to make sure there was no one else in line before speaking again. “It’s probably not my place to say... But thank you. You and Steve.”

Nancy’s brows drew together in confusion, and Susan clearly saw it, clarifying. “For Billy. The job. Inviting him over. It’s been good for him. I can tell it means a lot, and he’s... Well, he’s not a boy who’s had a lot of good times.”

“Oh, well we liked having him, I mean, we’re happy to, too,” Nancy told her honestly, surprised and a little touched. She doubted Susan had any idea about the previous... animosity between Steve and Billy, but that just made it a nicer thing to hear, that Billy clearly liked coming over.

“I’m glad, honey. Enjoy your dinner, ok?” Susan placed the bag into her cart, and gave her a little wink.

“We will,” Nancy promised, feeling like it wouldn’t be too hard of one to keep.

Nancy left most of the food on the counter while she took a quick shower. It was going to get used in an hour or so, anyway, so she figured it was fine. Steve had vacuumed the night before, and she’d told him she’d give the house a quick pick up before dinner. She was just hiding some dirty clothes in the washer when she heard the doorbell ring. Surprising. She’d figured Steve would bring Billy.

Instead, when she answered the door, Billy was standing there. He’d obviously cleaned up from work, not a speck of dirt and fresh clothes.

He held up a six-pack almost like a peace offering, clearing his throat.

“Steve said he'd be a little late. Something about Brian and Ken getting into it again, that you'd know what it meant.”

Nancy groaned, resting her head on the door frame. Did she ever. Both men were fantastic workers, but they were also full of themselves, and bigger divas than any girl she'd ever met in high school. “Of course.”

“Sue just dropped me off, but I could come back when he's home...”
Billy's voice trailed off, and Nancy shook her head.

“No, of course not, come on. You can tell me if I bought the right things, at least.” She stepped back, reaching out and taking the pack of beer. “Thanks, by the way.”

“Figured I drank half yours last time, only fair.”

It was thoughtful, but she suspected Billy was the kind of man who didn't like to hear too much how thoughtful he was. She put the beer in the fridge, instead, and showed him what she got, getting an appraisal and a quick 'yeah that'll work', before he went and started to prep.

Billy made himself at home in the kitchen. He figured someone had to. Nancy offered to help with the sort of hesitance that clearly stated that she should not be allowed to help, nor did she *really* want to. He shooed her to a chair, instead, where she perched, watching him with interest. They ended up sipping beer while Billy chopped peppers, and Nancy jotted down notes on a few reports. It was comfortable. It shouldn't have felt familiar, but it did.

"You got the right peppers by the way," he told her, tossing the diced vegetables into a bowl. "Where did the onions get to?"

"Well, good. There's like fifty kinds. I don't see why we need fifty kinds." Nancy got up and walked over to the counter to dig around in a store paper bag. "Oh yeah, I saw your mom at the store, today."

"She's *not my mo-*" The ease zapped out of his shoulders, and Billy's face went dark, so lost in the bitter snap of words that he'd repeated to his dad endlessly, no matter how hard he hit him, that he forgot where he was for a second. He saw Nancy take a sudden step back before his face softened, cleared. He forced himself to relax his body again before he spoke. "Susan's great. She is, but she's my stepmom."

"Ok..." Nancy agreed slowly and held out a pair of onions for him to take. She didn't look scared, but she looked wary, like she was around a dog she wanted to trust but wasn't quite sure if it was going to bite. It felt like a god damn kick to his stomach, even if he was the one who'd bared his teeth. She'd never looked at him like that before, and he wanted it to stop.

"I'm... Look, I'm sorry," he muttered quickly, turning all of his attention into peeling and dicing an onion. The rhythmic *thunk* of the

blade hitting the cutting board was easier to focus on than his pounding heart. “Neil, he... He used to get real mad about... Things like that.” His voice trailed off, and he had to squint harder at what he was doing, onion in the air making his eyes water.

He didn't focus on Nancy, almost startled when her hand came up to rest on his shoulder. Her delicate fingers squeezed there, comforting.

“You didn't have to,” she finally spoke. No pity. Billy didn't want it, and he'd learned to sniff it out a mile away.

“No, I did. I didn't want to be shitty at you.” He shrugged, not quite brushing off her touch. Her hand lingering made his stomach feel warm in a way he wouldn't let himself examine. Nancy gave him a little pat before she drew it back, and dug the rest of the ingredients out of the bag. By the time Steve came home, he had her peeling potatoes, under extreme duress.

“Steve, he's making me cook!” Nancy whined playfully, gasping when Steve started to dart right out of the kitchen just as he started to enter. “Hey, come back!”

“Nope!” Steve laughed and made a beeline for the bedroom, shutting the door theatrically loudly. He was really only planning on cleaning up first, but the shouted “*I'M YOUR WIFE!*” down the hall had him ready to double over laughing.

“Ok, ok, I'm coming!” he called back. He could hear their laughter in the kitchen. It was nice to come home to. He scrubbed up quickly

from being on site, and changed into something more comfortable before he made his way back out. Nancy's soft little lips were turned down into a playful pout.

"Oh, hey guys. Didn't see you out here."

"Really sticking your wife with all the work, Harrington? That's pretty damn low." Billy had turned from the counter, leaning back against it to look him over, shooting him a little grin.

"It looks like she has a handle on th—Nance!" Steve yelped when a couple of potato peelings were flung towards his *hair*. He brushed them out and gave her a wounded look. "Ok, alright. I have two hands, and I will use them, but I can't promise good results."

"Good, use them on *these*." Nancy pushed the peeler and an unpeeled potato into his hands. Steve knew when he'd been beaten, and accepted his defeat with only mild complaining and a sympathy kiss from Nancy.

Prepping vegetables was all they were allowed to do, which was... wise. Steve debated on setting the table while Billy finished cooking. It all smelled great. The only home cooked food either of them got was when they visited Nancy's parents' house. This was better. They could eat mashed potatoes and meatloaf without the awkward tension and family politics.

Nancy kept assuring him that her family didn't hate him. Nancy had changed quickly, and they didn't know how to handle that. Then everything else had happened so suddenly that they worried about

her, and that he'd swept her away too fast. They'd relax more with him. Eventually... In a few more years.

They didn't go to dinner often.

"How about we eat in the living room?" he suggested, and Nancy bobbed her head in agreement. That seemed nicer, less formal. Last thing Steve wanted was for this to feel like a business meeting. They all ended up parading out beer and plates piled high with mash and slices of meatloaf to the living room.

"Oh my god, Billy, this is so good!" Nancy praised him, and Steve watched fondly as she licked a dab of whipped potato off the corner of her mouth. "Thank you again."

"It's nothing." Billy had stretched out on the easy chair while they were on the couch. He seemed content enough to juggle his plate on his knee while he ate instead of sitting closer on the couch so he could reach the coffee table.

"Definitely not nothing," Steve disagreed around a bite of mashed potatoes. He swallowed them down with a happy groan. Billy was snorting, near rolling his eyes, but Steve was pretty sure he was holding back a smile.

"I'd offer to get you the recipe... But I wouldn't do that to meatloaf," Billy said instead, cracking open another beer. They all settled in and ate until the plates were empty and piled up on the coffee table to be cleaned later, much later. The beer kept coming. The conversation was stilted, at first. Steve wasn't sure if high school was ok to talk

about, so he avoided it, and he was off duty. He wasn't about to discuss welding.

Nancy saved the day, bringing up music. Billy was a fan of hard rock, and Steve happily teased him about being predictable. But apparently he wasn't opposed to some Madonna, either, which was more surprising.

"Max has been making me listen to her new album," Billy admitted, pausing, like he expected to get made fun of, but Steve just bobbed his head in agreement. "I think 'Express Yourself' was stuck in my head for weeks after it came on the radio a few times."

The ended up discussing instruments. Steve had always meant to learn the guitar but hadn't, Billy had always liked the drums. Nancy had played the flute in high school.

"Oh, and you said *my* music is predictable." Billy laughed and kept laughing when Nancy made an indignant noise and pushed on his knee with her foot.

"That was *Steve* making fun of you. You can't tease me for him."

"Well, sure I can. Marriage is about sharing, right?" Billy grinned widely, settling back more in the arm chair. The living room was

comfortable, warm enough to keep out the night chill. They kept talking for hours, easy, like they'd been doing this for forever. He paused when he noticed Nancy, who had been nodding off against Steve's shoulder for a while, finally curl up more and doze off.

"Should I..." He started to make a move, shifting to get up before Steve shook his head.

"Nah." Steve looked at her, his smile soft. "She wouldn't mind."

Billy nodded, settling back in. The idea of heading out didn't hold much appeal, anyway. He liked this more than he'd ever voice. He watched Nancy sleeping, soft breaths that must have been fanning across Steve's chest with the little rise and fall of hers.

"I'm glad you guys... Made it work," Billy said finally after he realized he'd been looking at Nancy too long, lost in thought over the past. He lifted his eyes to meet Steve's, instead. "Jesus, remember when I first got here... all the school could talk about was if you two were broken up for good or not."

Steve laughed, lifting an arm around Nancy more, cuddling her closer. "Yeah. Guess what, we hadn't. Can you get that blanket?" He nodded towards one on the end of the couch.

"Sure." Billy leaned over to grab it, opening it and hesitating before he helped drape it over her. He watched Steve take over, gentle hands tucking it around her. "Whole thing is pretty crazy, right now."

“What's that?” Steve turned his attention back towards him after he seemed satisfied Nancy was completely tucked against him. Sap.

“Nothing. S'just... Never pictured anything like this, you know?”

“Which part? The being invited over for dinner part? The working for me part? The fact that we don't hate each other? I mean, I don't think you hate me. You're not really that great at hiding your feelings.”

“No?”

“Oh no, I can definitely tell when you want to punch me.”

That earned a low chuckle from Billy, and they exchanged little smirks.

“Alright, wise guy, watch it or you might start getting that vibe now.”

“No way. You wouldn't, now.” Steve shook his head so confidently that it prickled at Billy's skin suddenly. Fuck Steve for being so sure about him being fucking domesticated now.

“That so?” Billy's fist clenched hard around the bottle of beer he'd been nursing for the last half hour.

Steve glanced down at his hand, seeming unfazed. “That's so.”

Billy felt his shoulders tighten more in defense, a slight scowl twisting his features. He didn't know why that pissed him off, but it had. Maybe all of the talk about high school brought it up. “Oh yeah?” His tone went gruffer, a little less smooth around the edges. “You really so sure about that, Harrington?”

“Yeah,” Steve pushed on, either oblivious or fearless or some maddening combination of both. “Come on, Billy. I don't mean that like it's a bad thing.” Steve waved his hand a little. “You're still the toughest guy I know. You fucking *fought a giant alien* monster. I just mean... It's good to be in a better place, right? I know I am... I'm glad you are, too. Feels kinda like, I don't know, like we made it.”

“...You mean that?”

“Yeah, of course.”

Billy scoffed, relaxing, blowing out a breath when his chest felt too tight from the sudden sharp twist and turn of emotions he'd just run through. “Well, god damn, Harrington. You've got a way of making someone feel good about themselves and like a dick all at the same time.”

“One of my only talents. You want the guest bed?”

“I can get home ok.” Billy shook his head at the idea. “Just need to

make a phone call.” He glanced at the clock. Susan was probably still up, or maybe not, it was late. He could walk...

“Come on, it's late.” Steve nudged Nancy gently. “Nance, shouldn't Billy sleep in the guest room?”

Billy watched Nancy as she stretched out under the cover, emitting a quiet, tired squeak at the effort. Christ, it was so cute it was disgusting. “Mhmm, made it up for him, in case,” she mumbled, sitting up and letting the blanket pool in her lap.

“You did?” Billy was surprised at the forethought, a little touched. “Well, if I had known that, I would have brought my pajamas,” he teased, leaning forward to give her a hand in standing up. He was surprised how tired he felt, too. It had been a long day and a long night. Maybe it wasn't such a terrible idea.

“We'll remind you to, next time,” Nancy agreed. She yawned before her hand went to steady herself on Billy's shoulder. Her next maneuver was to lean in and give him a little peck on the cheek. Soft and sweet, she smelled like sleep and the faintest traces of perfume. It was probably the sweetest thing a woman had ever done to him, and it rendered him speechless as she hobbled off, wrapped up in her covers.

“Night, Nance...”

Steve made certain Billy had everything he needed to get some rest, and then he made double certain Nancy was tucked in with a kiss which was what *she* needed to rest. He'd slept like a log beside her, her hand gripping onto his shirt collar as she slept. The next morning he could smell eggs cooking, and Nancy's sleepy voice was mumbling into his ear.

"Oh my god, is he making us breakfast? We're keeping him."

"Oh my god. Yeah, totally."

They'd both made a sleepy expedition to the kitchen, where Billy had cobbled together the leftover dinner groceries into omelets and fried potatoes, and they immediately invited him to go to their traditional Saturday movie with them then come back for dinner the next Friday.

Dinner that next week turned into dinner every Friday. Then one or twice during the week, when Billy could just bring over a pair of work clothes for the next morning. Billy used their kitchen more than they ever had, and their stomachs were all the happier for it.

They were spending a lot of time together, and Steve liked it. He liked being around Billy a lot. They were... Friends. Actually, if he were being honest, he could easily say that Billy was becoming his best friend aside from Nancy now, and he was sure she felt the same. The house started to feel quiet on the nights Billy wasn't over. They ended up calling him, bugging him on the phone for a few hours while they all watched the same thing on TV or just talked.

"You don't think we're *really* pestering him do you?" Nancy worried. She'd been painting her toenails, and then Steve's because she was bored and the bottle was open.

Steve wiggled them at her and shook his head. "I'm not sure my color is electric orange... And nah. Billy isn't really the kind of guy who would answer the phone just to be polite."

"Fair point." Nancy laughed. It was a perfect lazy Sunday. They'd done laundry, vacuumed, and then spent the rest of the afternoon in bed picking apart the leftovers from the roast chicken Billy had made Friday and watching TV. After their phone call with Billy, Nancy had stretched out beside him, cuddling close and resting her head against the pillow. There was nothing better than a lazy afternoon nap, and Steve felt himself drifting off with her, an arm slung around her tiny waist.

When he slept, his dreams were anything but sweet and soft like the idyllic picture they'd made drifting off. They were hot, and heavy, and *unbelievable*. Too real, too unreal all at once. Steve woke up quickly, feeling sweat on his skin and breathing quick in his nose. Hot all over in a way that made him want to writhe on the sheets. Nancy's hand touched his cheek, and even that contact felt like too much to take. He blinked up at her, dazed, eyes clouded as she looked down with an amused smile.

"Good dreams, tiger?" Nancy's head tilted playfully, and her slender fingers trailed over the obvious tent in his boxers. He'd soaked through the front in his sleep, and Nancy's fingers touched into the wet there, teasing his tip through the thin material. He hissed and

arched up into the caress with a roll of his hips. God, he was about ready to burst. He hadn't had a wet dream in ages, but he felt almost there, *almost*.

"A-ah, yeah, something like that." Steve swallowed down a gasp, voice scratchy from sleep, and still too turned on from what his dreams had just fed him. "Oh god, *Nance*, come on, don't stop," he complained, not too proud to whine when her hand stilled.

"Should I be jealous? Was she prettier than me?" Nancy's nose wrinkled teasingly, and she swung her leg over his hip, settling her slender body on top of his. The shirt she'd gone to bed with was pooled above her thighs, and she mercilessly gave a little rock of her own hips, rubbing them together, the silk from his boxers sliding over her panties, the friction and heat making him pant out under her.

"Was you," Steve assured her quickly, head feeling so cloudy still. Because that was sure the truth. As sure as it was the truth that he could still see Billy's strong hands all over her slender body when he blinked.

"Really?" She smiled down at him and he bobbed his head, desperately seeking her approval, and more contact.

"You were so sexy." He reached up for her, sliding his hands under her shirt and squeezing her soft little breasts. When his fingertips traced over her nipples, they had already pebbled, and Nancy hummed, pleased as she shoved down his boxers. *God*. That was so much better, just the little slip of cotton from her underwear keeping them apart.

“Ah— Oh? What were you doing to me?” Nancy murmured, leaning down closer and pressing their lips together for an open mouth kiss. He ground up into her, panted against his lips, and felt like they were teenagers again, dry humping and heavy handed in the back of his car. She was getting sticky wet, dripping enough that he could feel it through the fabric, and he was torn between wanting to fuck her and wanting her to climb onto his face. He was distracted from her question when her fingers sank into his hair without warning and yanked, forcing his head back and rubbing their noses together. He whimpered, that move always made him fucking *weak*, and she damn well knew it.

“Wasn't me,” Steve blurted out, and he felt Nancy pause over him.

“Wait, what do you mean? Was it me and... someone else—Oh my god, it *was*.” Nancy gasped quietly, clearly reading his expression.

“Ughh, don't be mad—” He was stopped by Nancy leaning down to kiss him again. So, clearly she wasn't mad.

“Of course I'm not *mad*, silly. I'm just curious. Who was it?”

Steve started to open his mouth to refuse to answer when her hips rolled slowly again, reminding him of just how hard he was right now, how much he was leaking for her, and how good she felt. He shook his head quickly.

“Aw, Stevie.” Nancy pouted cutely over him, little bottom lip pushed out and ready to huff. “Come on, baby.”

“No way.” He shook his head quickly. Not a god damn chance. He'd take that to his grave, his damn grave, and there was nothing Nancy could do—

His inner denial froze when Nancy reached to slide her panties aside, her fingers stroking over her own lips, wet and soft and so inviting. Nancy wasn't usually one to use her body to get what she wanted from him, but when she was determined, it was fucking diabolical.

“Mmm—Stevie, come on,” Nancy moaned, high and soft in her chest when her finger ran along her clit. and Steve wanted to melt into the bed. It just wasn't fair. She was too perfect.

“I just wanna know, Stevie, *please?*” she whispered out, breath catching in her throat as she toyed with her pussy. Steve could feel her thighs quiver and squeeze around him. Nancy wasn't faking, she was all in, and Steve was just powerless.

“You can't—You can't be mad if I tell you,” Steve panted out quietly. He was hot all over, embarrassed and so fucking turned on that he was about to lose his mind. Nancy seemed to take some sort of sympathy, finally, because she lifted, took his cock in her delicate, wet fingers, and pushed the head of it against her lips.

“Promise,” she agreed breathily as she slid down his length. Steve closed his eyes, he had to, or he was going to lose it right then, barely inside of her. He breathed deep, tried to hold back with a low, desperate whine as she took him inside. Too warm, too sweet.

“Who?”

Steve whimpered.

“Steve?” Nancy’s hand touched his cheek and his eyes flicked up to meet hers.

“*Billy*,” he admitted, embarrassed. He waited for her to laugh, for her to be mad or weirded out and stop or something.

“...What did he do?”

“W-What?”

Nancy laid out over him, shifting him inside of her. Her sweatshirt had ridden up, and her entire body felt perfectly warm against his as she leaned close to his ear, whispering. “*Tell me what he did to me, baby.*”

Steve moaned, and dripped inside of her. He had zero resistance even knowing how absolutely *absurd* it was to tell his wife about how he’d dreamed their best friend had fucked her. “It was so hot,” he whispered against her mouth, instead. “He was so deep inside of you, you were moaning. I could—I could see him sliding inside of you.”

“Yeah?” Nancy’s own breathing had turned heavier. Her kisses open mouth over his lips as she shifted, a slow rock that dragged him along her soft inner walls, made him dizzy and his brain go hazy as

she moaned over him, gripped him inside. “You liked seeing it?” she asked, her voice shakier, less focused.

“Yeah, Nance, *Jesus*,” Steve babbled. “He was on top of you, god, he looked good on top of you. I was watching, like, like in the dream I was watching him touch you, fuck you. You both knew it, too, you were showing off.”

“Where were you?” Nancy lifted her hips up, stoking his cock inside of her as she rode him slowly.

“T-Touching myself, on the bed beside you. You reached out and held my hand when...”

“When?”

“When you were coming,” Steve whispered out, and he felt Nancy *squeeze* around him. He was done after that. His hips bucked up, and hers pushed down to meet him. His started to bite his bottom lip, but Nancy's lips were on his, instead. Her hand was on her clit, and she was shaking over him, coming on top of him so fast it made his own head spin as he came inside of her.

He wrapped his arms around her as they worked to catch their breath. Steve laughed quietly finally, touching their foreheads together.

“That was... Something.” He cleared his throat, squeezing her slender

hip.

“Too far?” Nancy sat up more and put a hand on his chest, her tone worried. “I just thought...”

“No, geeze, no. Like. I'm the one who dreamed it, right?” Steve assured her.

Nancy relaxed, nodding as she leaned in close to kiss his cheek.
“Pretty kinky,”

He snorted. “God, yeah, tell me about it.” Steve scrubbed his hands over his face. “I don't even get it.” He looked over at her. “Like... I wasn't mad or anything. Like, all I wanted to do was watch,” Steve babbled, the dream still too fresh in his head. “Like. We were all still friends, there was just... also that, I guess? It just made sense when I dreamed it.”

“Wanna know a secret?” Nancy said suddenly, grabbing his attention.

“Uhm, yeah? Sure...”

“I've got a cousin like that.”

“Like *what*? ”

“Like... She has two guys she lives with, and they're all just... ”

together,” Nancy explained thoughtfully. “Like, they all love each other and stuff. I only know ‘cause I heard my mom gossiping about it over the phone.”

Steve felt pretty mind blown by that. Like sure, there was porn out there with groups and threesomes and stuff, boys used to pass that shit around in the locker rooms all the time. But the idea of it being more than just some sex and parting ways... Kinda crazy. “I guess your family is like... kinda weird about that, huh?”

“They don't talk about it except to gossip.” Nancy's nose crinkled. She'd always hated gossip in school, and now as an adult, when older adults in her family decided she could finally be 'privy' to it, she liked it even less. “She brings them to family picnics every few years or so. Everyone just calls them her 'friends', and you should see my dad's eyes near roll out of his head as he says it. “But you know what? Whatever. Meadow's really nice, and they're nice. Good for them.” Her voice turned stubborn at the end, and it made Steve smile, kiss her shoulder.

“Kinda cool... Is she a big hippie?”

“Well, duh,” Nancy shot back, and giggled when their eyes met. “*Huge* hippy.” She laughed more, and Steve joined in, relaxing back against the headboard and pulling her against his chest. His fingers traced over her collarbone, and he couldn't help but think about that.

“Wonder how it even works.”

Nancy's eyes had closed, relaxed, and she reached to play with his

other hand. “Hm?”

“Nothing.” He cleared his throat. “Never mind.”

“No, what?” Nancy ended up twisting in his arms, pressing a soft little kiss to his chest as she looked up at him. One of her top five moves that made him reveal every secret he had. Probably number three.

“I was just like, you know. Wondering how they worked that out... How it was for them, I mean. Is for them...”

“Are you...” Nancy's voice trailed off, looking up at him uncertainly. There was mischief there, but caution. He could definitely get why. God, how often had they fought over Jonathan until he'd finally gotten that the attraction there wasn't going to lead to Nancy slipping off with him. Right now, they were both dancing around something, though, tiptoeing around an idea that was absolutely wild and crazy, and that had to be handled with a great level of finesse or it could end in disaster.

“Billy's hot,” he blurted out dumbly, instead.

“*Steven.*” Nancy burst into another laugh, managing to swallow it down after a few giggles escaped. “I know, baby. He's really hot. You... maybe want to tell me something else?”

“If Billy touched you, that would be really hot.” Steve pushed

forward because Nancy wasn't looking at him like he was crazy, and he was already in for a penny, so he might as well keep going.

"It kinda *would* be," Nancy agreed, and Steve watched how her cheeks started to glow pink. He reached and cupped his hand over one.

"Do you think..."

"We can't *assume* he'd want to," Nancy finally pointed out. She was feeling pretty warm. This was a side to Steven that she hadn't really seen before, and she'd be lying if she said it didn't excite her just as much as the idea he was floating out there.

"Ok, but like... If it did. If *you* wanted to... I think I'd be ok with that."

"Just ok?" Nancy laughed, kissing his shoulder and listening to him whimper, pouty face and all.

"It'd be *so* hot, ok?" Steve admitted and Nancy ran a hand fondly through his hair.

"If... I'm not saying, yet. But *if*... we did. You have to be sure you'd be

ok with being friends with him after seeing that,” Nancy pointed out fairly. She liked Billy, Steve liked Billy. She wasn’t going to mess that up over something like this.

Steve nodded sincerely. “I’ll think about it before we try anything. It’s not like I’m gonna ring him up right now and go ‘hey Hargrove, want to come over and fuck my wife while I watch?’—ok stopping now,” he laughed under Nancy’s hand covering his mouth, kissing her palm.

They didn’t talk about it again for weeks. Nancy thought that maybe after Steve had gotten off on the idea and then slept on it, he’d decided it was better as a random, kinky fantasy in the dark. That was ok with her. She liked Billy a lot, and she could certainly see the appeal, but it wasn’t something she was going to obsess over.

Especially not with the holidays coming up. The second November hit, the weeks started to turn into a blur.

5. Chapter 5

Billy had a love / hate relationship with the holidays. Actually, that wasn't even true. It was more that Billy had spent so many years hating the holidays that it was hard for him to accept that part of him still loved them, that it was *ok* to enjoy them, now. So he spent thanksgiving fighting over who got the bigger half of the wishbone with Max. The next day, he let Susan drag him along to pick out a Christmas tree. Between the two of their paychecks, there was enough to catch up on things and actually have a pretty nice Christmas.

He spent an entire day out going from store to store with Steve trying to figure out presents for all of the girls. Steve was *much* better at that, except for Max. Billy proudly knew that brat better than anyone. He spent the rest of the time looking for things for Susan, and after testing the waters to make sure it wasn't a bad idea, Nancy. He'd get something for Steve, later, too.

It was easy to get ideas when he watched him shop. Steve would be chatting with him before trailing off, stopping mid-sentence to zip over to window displays and stare inside. After the third time, Billy was used to it. He just snorted and shoved his chilly hands into his jacket pockets, taking the detour with him.

"Sorry." Steve's tone was breathless, nose smooshed just-so against the glass. Ridiculous. "Dustin is super into these RV cars right now," he explained, nodding his head towards a mini car that was spinning around on a table inside. Billy was pretty sure Steve had already mentioned seven things Dustin was "super into" so far, but whatever. He just nodded in agreement and dug out a cigarette while Steve chewed on his bottom lip and debated on going into the store.

“Make up your mind. Freezing my ass off, Harrington.” Billy snorted, but it just made Steve laugh.

“It’s barely chilly, you know?”

“Don’t fucking get at me with that.” Billy scrunched his shoulders up. It was *cold*. It didn’t matter how many winters Billy spent in Indiana, he’d never get used to it, and god was he dreading when it got even colder. He shot Steve a dirty look. Man didn’t even have a jacket on, just long sleeves and a pair of snug black jeans that hugged his skin. Steve’s style had come a long way since high school, and he could appreciate that.

“Oh, hey, Will would love that...” Steve’s voice trailed off, and Billy bit back a groan, trailing after him dutifully.

There was a workplace Christmas party. Steve’s old man had sprung for it every year, and they’d kept up the tradition. They’d rented out a hall and everyone, including their families, were invited. Max had opted out, and he envied the lucky brat, but he’d enjoyed taking Susan. She’d pulled him out onto the dance floor under duress, and she was all smiles as she guided him through a simplified foxtrot.

“I didn’t know you could dance,” Billy laughed, holding his hand and spinning her back towards him.

“I’d always loved to,” Sue confided, her smile wistful. “I used to,

almost every weekend, but your father didn't dance and he wouldn't... Well, I couldn't go by myself."

Billy gave her a tight, understanding smile. They didn't ever talk about his dad, not really, and he preferred it that way. "I'd go. We should drag Max with us. You can teach us both all of your moves."

Sue laughed and patted his arm. "I don't want to take up your Saturday nights. Besides, can you imagine how *happy* Maxine would be over being dragged out by us on her weekends?"

"Oh yeah, she'd love it," Billy joked back, chuckling. "But we'll bribe her or something, and I wanna go. Sounds great," he promised.

"Hey, Billy!"

The call had Billy turning his head, snorting when he saw Steve decked out in an unmistakable red Santa coat and pants. Susan shook her head and squeezed Billy's hand, giving them some time alone and going to get another drink.

"Jesus, Christ, seriously? You didn't warn me about this." Billy reached out to tug the white puffy hem on Steve's coat before letting go with a click of his tongue. Ridiculous. He hated how much he loved it. How *Steve* it was.

"I didn't want you bringing a Polaroid." Steve laughed, and sure enough he even had a bag slung over his shoulder. "It's for the kids

that come, you know. We picked out coloring books and other stuff for them.”

“So he claims,” Nancy happily piped in as she joined them. *She* looked beautiful. Pretty red dress that cut off at her knee, and her hair curled up to frame her cheeks. Her face had a happy flush to it, prettier than a Hallmark Christmas card. “We both know it’s just as much for him, don’t we, Billy?”

“Sure do, Nance,” Billy agreed, ignoring Steve’s unhappy huff just to rile him up more. “Not fooling a god damn soul.”

“Alright, alright,” Steve protested. “Knock it off, or I’m telling everyone you’re both my elves,” Steve called back to them. Billy watched with Nancy as a group of little kids, all hyped up on cookies and cake, swarmed him.

Sucker.

“I’m not getting him back, I don’t think,” Nancy mused, biting her bottom lip to hold back a laugh.

“He never stood a chance,” Billy agreed, shaking his head. Nancy turned and winked.

“Guess we’ll have to dance while he’s gone.”

That ended up being late into the party. Billy had had another round of drinks and dances with Susan before he had Nancy on the floor again. Her head was resting lightly on his shoulder, a move he'd felt a couple of times, now, from movie nights. Familiar. Soft.

“Falling asleep on me?” Billy realized, amused.

“Mm, sorry. We were here the whole day preparing.” Nancy pulled back, smiling up at him as she rubbed her eyes. Billy chuckled and gave her hand a little squeeze.

“Wait here, I'll get you some coffee.”

Billy peeled away from her, found the carafe of coffee on the sweets stand, and took his time pouring out a cup, 2 sugars 1 cream. He'd seen her drink it often enough in the morning. When he turned around to find her, he saw Steve had beaten him back onto the dance floor. Well, they'd find him after the song. He went to take a seat at a nearby table, setting the coffee down.

Billy traced his finger slowly around the rim of the cup as he watched them dancing. Nancy was looking up at Steve. His hands were holding hers, and the look he was giving her made Billy feel his heart twist in his chest in all sorts of ways. He felt all those things he'd been trying to ignore building up every dinner, every time he went out with them, or spent the night in their guestroom. Always ignoring how Nancy's lips felt when she kissed his cheek. The special little smiles Steve gave when he was happy, and his *stupid* laugh when he was drunk and thought you'd said just about the funniest thing in the world.

Shit.

He always ignored those things because it was safer than admitting he was falling in love with a married woman, that Nancy was a type he'd never thought he'd have, that he cared about Steve more than anything he could name, and thinking about it made his chest *ache*. That sickening realization that he had *never* been this happy just being around them.

He ignored all of that because he was terrified of fucking up the best thing he'd found in his life by getting too greedy. Nancy was one married woman he wouldn't be touching, and Steve... Billy didn't even understand all of those weird pangs in his heart when he looked at him and wanted to touch his hand, his hair, *anything*.

Best to ignore it all. Safer.

"If you think I'm touching you in that costume, you got another thing coming, Steve. Some things are *sacred*." Nancy was laughing even as she warned him, batting away Steve's hands between taking off her earrings and heels.

Steve laughed behind her, finally pulling off the red Santa coat and hanging it up in their closet. His hands went to her shoulders and rubbed, immediately making her groan and lean back into him. The party had been a whole lot of fun, but exhausting. Steve's hands made his way across her shoulders, and by the time she was sighing and melting against his frame, he'd wrapped his arms around her waist. He squeezed her close, lips against her ear. There was a

hesitation, a pause in his breath, before he finally whispered.

“I was watching you two, at the party... Watching you dance with him, and I... *Baby... I still want to.*”

“...Yeah?” A little shiver ran up Nancy's spine, and her toes curled into the carpet as those words tickled her ear. She didn't have to ask what he meant. “You sure?” she questioned, before she let herself get too involved in the ideas racing through her brain. She suddenly felt *very* awake.

“Really, really, totally, one hundred percent sure,” Steve promised.
“Can't get it out of my head.”

“Well *yeah*. You put it into *my* head, too, you know?” she accused him, tipping her head back on his shoulder so she could look up at him. His lips pressed against her forehead in a little kiss that was all smile.

“Mhm... How are we gonna... You know?” Steve whispered, tickling against her skin.

“I guess we'll... Talk to him about it?” Nancy could hear the questioning in her own voice even as she said it.

“That sounds... not great.”

“We'll figure something out. Can't force it.” She turned around in his arms. “Let's see if he's busy on New Year's Eve, though. Even if he doesn't want to, it's been a while since we've had time. I miss getting him just to us. Party isn't the same.” The holiday season had disrupted their usual Friday nights. She knew they had their parents' party, too, that night, but it was early, they didn't have to stay for the ball drop, and they could make it work.

“Sure, I'll invite him tomorrow,” Steve promised, and pulled her towards the bed. Tired or not, they ended up staying up half the night. They were both giddy over the idea of things to come, and Steve was *very* persuasive when he had his mouth all over her.

Steve was the one picking him up today for the car pool. Billy had been putting away cash, saving for at least a junker that he could put some work into, get him more mobile, but for now he was still carpooling. Once the other guys with them were out and going to clock in, Steve looked his way, giving him a little smile. They always seemed to end up in the car together a few minutes alone, before going their separate ways.

“We wanted to have a little New Year's Eve party. You in?”

“Yeah? Sure, sure of course.” Billy agreed quickly even if he cringed a little inwardly. The company Christmas party had been fun, but brutal. He didn't know how or when it had come about, but big parties just weren't him, anymore. He'd really only spent the night

mingling with them and Susan. Still, he wanted the time, so he'd take it. "Who all is coming?"

"Just us, really. You could ring in the new year with us and then spend the night." Steve smiled. "If that's ok. I mean you could invite some people if you wanted, or I guess we could invite the gang..."

"No, just us is great," Billy interrupted before Steve got any ideas. Idiot. "Should I cook?"

"No way, it's a party. We're just gonna order some food. You cook for us all the time."

"I'll bring something, then," Billy offered.

"Actually yeah, Nancy figured you might want to. She said maybe some wine?"

"Wine?" Billy made an amused face. "Sure. Wine." He could do that for Nancy.

Billy's breath blew out in the cold as he stood outside the house, bottles in hand. White Christmas and all that. Billy could admit that it was one thing that Indiana had Cali beat on. One thing. It was pretty and all, but fuck it was cold, too. Steve blinked at him when he opened the front door. Billy had half expected Steve to be wearing the same tacky Santa suit he'd worn to the company party. But instead, he stood in the entryway wearing a pair of nice slacks and a

button-down with little flecks of blocky color all over it. He was clearly holding back a laugh, and taking in the heavy parka and scarf Billy had swaddled himself in before leaving the house.

“*What*, Harrington, it's cold,” Billy complained, and when Steve laughed, he snorted and laughed with him, shouldering his way into the house while kicking some snow off onto the front mat.

“Is that the most clothes you've ever worn?”

“Yeah, and *what of it?*”

“Oh nothing, man, nothing. It's a good look.”

Nancy stepped out of the kitchen and smiled. “Hey, Billy!” She was dressed in a flashy silver dress. A little shorter than he was used to seeing on her. His eyes went to the bare flash of her thigh, before he righted them up.

“Nance! Hey.” He leaned down for a hug, and she wrapped right around him, pressing a little kiss to his cheek that made him feel too soft already. “You look great. Feeling underdressed here,” he told her as he pulled back and unpeeled his layers. He'd just gone for some jeans and his favorite red button-down. Buttoned higher than he used to wear it. That was the bitch of the thing about scars. Too many damn questions. Well, it was too cold for that shit, anyway.

“Oh, thanks, and not at all. My parents wanted us to do a little thing over there, too, so we just got back from it. We could go change.”

“No way, it's a party, remember? Gotta have that sparkle.” Billy flashed her a grin. “Here, got your stuff.” He proudly held out a bag of bottles for her. They hadn't really specified how much wine to buy. But, like, a few bottles between them seemed like enough.

“Billy, honey...” Nancy lifted one of the bottles to read the label before she looked up him. “This is champagne?”

Fuck.

“Isn't that the same thing?” Billy asked. He hated that stupid little twist of insecurity in the pit of his stomach, how his face threatened to heat up, and he felt himself get defensive. He'd fucked up something easy. He'd just asked the guy for something nice for a party. He should have specified, and now he looked like dumb white trash who didn't know the difference between wine and champagne, because there was one, apparently.

“Actually... It's better.” Nancy's smile lit up her whole face, and Billy felt his lungs release the breath they were holding.

“I don't know what I was even thinking when I said wine. I love champagne, and it's so much better for New Year's.”

“Well, then, I got it just for you, Nance,” Billy told her with a wide smile.

Nancy smiled back softly. She'd seen Billy's face go to quiet upset when she'd mentioned the error, and it hadn't sat right with her at all. This was supposed to be a fun little party. Besides, champagne was better, it just got her tipsy faster.

They ate the mountain of leftovers her parents had sent them home with them, Nancy curled up beside Steve. Billy still almost always took the easy chair, but they'd moved it closer to the couch. Close enough that he could stretch his legs out and prop his bare feet up on the cushions beside them. She smiled and poked his toes with her own, watching them curl in defensively. She had a strong suspicion that Billy was ticklish. She was also ticklish, though, so it would be too dangerous of a gamble to try to find out.

"Hey, you know, I also got us a little something else to ring in the new year." Billy reached down into his pants pocket and pulled out a little baggie and a pack of rolling papers.

Steve snorted out an amused laugh, and Nancy covered her face to hold back a peel of delighted giggles. "Oh my god, Billy, you didn't." Of course he did. She was honestly amazed it hadn't happened sooner during any of their evenings in.

"Come on, you can try it. Promise it doesn't bite." Billy shook the little baggie at her. "Try it?"

She laughed more. “Billy, do you think I’ve never smoked? It’s just been years. Geeze, it was back in high school, I think, now.” Had it really been that long? It felt like it had to have been. She knew Steve still did on occasion, but she’d only really been interested in it as a group. Well, three counted as a group. She nodded her consent.

Billy broke into a wide grin. He’d been a little worried he’d get yelled at for bringing it. “Well, well, well, *Nancy Wheeler*. Look at you,” he teased, looking at her admiringly. “Didn’t think you were the type.”

“Yeah,” Steve leaned forward quickly to snatch up the baggie and open it. “That’s why she never got in trouble for it, man. You should have seen. One time, we were smoking under the bleachers, and ‘Mrs. Hankins’ found us. She yelled at me, Carol, and Tommy for smoking around Nancy and being a bad influence, before sending us to detention... and Nancy back to class.”

Nancy giggled more, clearly unrepentant, and Steve laughed with her. He leaned back on the couch, pulling out one of the rolling papers and getting started. Billy watched his long fingers confidently tap out some of the weed onto the paper, before he rolled it tightly. Steve could be awkward, but his fingers were graceful, almost elegant.

Steve looked up at Billy, catching his eyes as his tongue dipped out to lick and seal the end slowly. The room felt heavy around Billy as he watched his tongue slowly slide back between pink lips, and his

stomach turned warm, like he'd already taken that first hit into his lungs.

"Sorry." Steve smiled a little sheepishly. "You mind?"

Billy swallowed and shook his head. "Not at all."

Steve's grin widened when Billy held out his lighter. "This is cool." Billy watched his thumb rub against the little skull Billy had etched in there years ago.

"Thanks. Stole it from my dad a long time ago." It had been his grandfather's, one of his dad's prized possessions. At the time, he'd stolen it to piss him off, because he knew his dad couldn't prove he had, and he only had so many ways of fighting back. Billy shrugged off the thought. He didn't want to think about Neil tonight. He watched the blue flame from the lighter kiss edge of the joint, instead. Watched Steve's lips wrapped around the other end as he slowly inhaled. Billy held his breath with him, swore he could feel it in his own lungs as he watched Steve's chest on the exhale.

"You definitely got this shit from Tommy." Steve grinned, holding it out for Nancy. Her slender legs shifted on the couch so she could lean in closer to Steve. She didn't take it from his hand, just leaned in and smiled, looking into Steve's eyes as she took a long hit.

Billy swallowed hard. He suddenly felt like this was maybe a bad idea. He got too loose when he got high. He ran his mouth too much. They sometimes felt like too much for him to watch, a veil pulled back and showing all the things he'd pretend he didn't want, because

he couldn't have them... Sure, he knew they were friends or whatever, but he didn't want to say something shitty and fuck everything up.

He shook off those thoughts, too, he had to, or he knew smoking was going to make them worse, paranoia getting the better of him. When Steve handed over the joint, he took a shorter breath than he usually did, didn't hold it in his lungs as long. He would have gotten mocked for it at any of the parties he used to go to. A 'pussy'. But Steve just watched and reached out to take it back, after. None of that, here. It was safe, here. The thought and the smoke had Billy relaxing, breathing out. What did he have to worry about?

They smoked one joint together, and then another. Nancy got up to put on the TV. The countdown was a while away, but she figured having it on in the background wouldn't hurt. She went to get the champagne, and came back to see Billy watching fondly as Steve gave himself the giggle fits trying to toss popcorn into their mouths.

"You're cleaning that up tomorrow," she warned, and he tipped his head back on the arm of the couch to grin at her.

"I'll clean it up next year."

"Fucking cheesy." Billy scoffed and took the champagne bottle when she handed it to him. "Early, ain't it?"

"Yeah, but I want it now. We'll save a bottle to toast," Nancy decided. She perched on the coffee table, her knees bumping Billy's as she

watched his strong fingers force the cork up. It popped loudly, clearly startling him, and when it started to fizz up quickly Nancy shrieked, grabbing it up and trying not to laugh as she drank from the bottle to save the carpets.

"You're a hero and a trooper, Nance. Take that one for the team." Steve finally sat up, grinning and taking the bottle from her when it was safe.

She wiped her hand against her mouth to catch a droplet. The bubbles had tickled her nose, and she knew that Billy had definitely made the right choice bringing them champagne. She slipped her finger between her lips, licking it clean. When she looked up, Billy looked away quickly. Had he been watching? She hoped so. They'd talked about maybe bringing it up soon...

Steve passed the bottle to Billy, then back to her. Like the weed, it was gone too soon, so they opened another bottle. Nancy was pleasantly tipsy. They were laughing together. It was a party, a perfect little spell having been cast over the evening. She loved how her boys looked when they smiled at each other, warm and content, like they could leave all of the bad things behind.

There was an old Christmas commercial playing on the TV, and it made her sit up more. "Oh! Billy, we never gave you your present," she remembered suddenly. She stood up and took his hands, pulling on them. "It's in the hall closet, come on."

"Coming... Geeze, you're strong for something so tiny." Billy laughed, clearly letting himself be pulled along.

Nancy laughed in return, stumbling just so, off her balance. It wasn't her fault she'd forgotten to take off her heels. She wasn't drunk, and her high had left her a long time ago. She just felt giddy with them, high and bubbly with laughter, and it was more than the champagne and weed could ever do. Billy's hand went to the small of her back, and her knees felt weak and wobbly at the unexpected touch. Her hand reached out to grab a fistful of his shirt when she almost lost her step down the hall.

"Jesus, easy, easy, Nance." Billy's strong arm wrapped around her waist, helping her prop against the wall. "You're such a lightweight, honey," he teased her, tongue pressed against the back of his teeth as he grinned.

Nancy laughed, her hands reaching up to sink into his shirt, taking a handful of the material in each fist to steady herself. "I'm not, I'm *not*," she protested, tipping her head back. Her blue eyes had a twinkle in them and Billy felt a little caught up in the moment.

"No?" he asked quietly, his smirk turning into a softer smile down at her.

"Uh-uh, it's about *ratios*. If you were my size, and drank and smoked like I did, you'd be on the *floor*, buster."

Billy cackled softly and brushed a little sweep of stray hair off her cheek without really thinking about the motion, or how natural it felt. He'd started to tell her that she didn't have any way of proving that when he realized they hadn't moved away from each other. His

arm was still around her, and he could smell how nice she smelled, how warm she was... He leaned, just for a second, just enough that his forehead rested against hers, enough that he could feel her start to lean up against him to close the distance to...

Billy stopped, and not because he didn't want to, oh god he wanted to so bad that pulling back was almost a physical hurt, but because he knew what he could be ruining if he did.

"You ok?" Nancy's hand had moved to his shoulder, and she rubbed there, looking concerned.

"Yeah, yeah, of course, think maybe I should get some air, though—I
__"

Steve cleared his throat quietly behind them. The sound was what it was clearly going to take make his presence known to Billy, because he'd been standing there in the hall the last few minutes watching them, having gotten up to make sure Billy didn't open his gift without him.

Nancy looked past Billy's arm to smile at Steve. She'd snuck a glance at him earlier, and now her cheeks were flushed pink, clearly turned on as Billy leaned over her in the hall. Steve, god, they hadn't really even done anything, and he was so fucking hard it was embarrassing, especially if Billy didn't go for this. But he couldn't help it. Billy was thick, and with him almost pressed against Nancy, the stark size difference in their frames was overwhelming.

“Shit. Shit!” Billy pushed off the wall. His eyes were wide, guilty. Which was a little funny, because Steve knew it *hadn’t* been what it looked like. Steve was more than impressed that he’d stopped. He took it as a sign of just how much Billy valued their friendship. Kinda touching. He wondered just what sort of thoughts Billy’s mind had gotten up to, though, for him to look like his hand had been caught in the cookie jar when really he’d just been putting the lid back on. “This isn’t... I know it looks like—”

“Like you’re trying to get in Nancy’s skirt?” Steve tilted his head, taking a step closer. This wasn’t how they were going to do this *at all*. They hadn’t even talked to him about it, yet. Neither one had *planned* it to happen like this. *They* were being crazy, but who the fuck cared. They could make their own decisions, including Billy. They were all grownups. “Cause it looks a lot like that.” He crossed his arms, leaning on the opposite wall of the hall as he looked them up and down.

“And, really, I’m not sure why you stopped on my account.”

“*Steven*. That’s *awful*.” Nancy pressed her lips together to stifle a laugh, and clearly had some pity on Billy. “Hey, it’s ok, he’s not mad. He doesn’t look mad, right?” she asked, voice a little playful. Her hand had gone from Billy’s shoulder to more boldly touching over his bicep.

“That’s not...” His voice trailed off before it came back stronger. “You *want* me to touch her.” Billy’s realization was cut out sharply, almost an accusation. But Steve watched him swallow hard. “Is that what this has been about, with you two? Why we’ve been spending time...” Steve shook his head quickly, cutting him off.

“No, Billy. Jeeze, no, nothing like that,” he promised earnestly. He didn’t want Billy to think they’d been like, just using him for a thrill.

“Not at all,” Nancy spoke up. Steve watched as she reached for Billy’s hand, her soft thumb running along his knuckles, and he tilted his head back down, attention on her again. He was staring down at her with an expression Steve couldn’t quite read.

“You’re our *friend*. You know that, right?” She smiled, head tilted up to look into his eyes. They were so close, Steve was sure they could feel each other’s breath as they spoke. “Our *best friend*. It’s just that... Maybe we could be a little more than that... Steve had this dream, and well, I know it’s wild, but since we’ve been spending so much time together, we’ve been feeling some things... Have you?” she asked, and Billy didn’t answer verbally. He was still looking at her intensely, his head dipping into a short, quick nod. Nancy smiled more, clearly pleased. “We thought maybe... If you *wanted* to, Steve could watch... but that doesn’t mean we have to.”

“Or that you’re not our friend if you don’t want to,” Steve added quickly. “That’d be shitty, like super shitty.”

Billy’s head tilted, and he finally turned his attention to him, looking him over. Steve could feel his eyes rake down his body in a way that made him shiver. He watched, holding his breath as Billy’s pupils dilated, and his voice dropped to a lower, rougher octave that made goosebumps break out on Steve’s skin.

“So you had a *dream* about it? You dreamt about your wife taking my cock, and you want to see how good it looks in reality, Harrington? That it? You want to hear how she sounds when I’m inside of her?” His lips were pulled up into a smirk that was confident and filthy

now that he knew the situation.

“Yeah,” Steve breathed out in a heavy rush, heat flooding his body, making his skin too hot and the room feel lighter.

“What about you, huh, Nance?” Billy turned his head back to push his forehead against Nancy's. He watched her chest rise and fall, her eyes fixed up on him. “You into this, too? Into me?”

“Yeah, Billy, *please*,” she whispered, voice all worked up but still a little shy. Billy knew what a girl looked like when she wanted it, when she was all hot and bothered at the thought of finally getting it.

Fucking perverts. Billy wanted to crow with joy. Who the fuck ever could have guessed that Steve and Nancy really were his kind of people. He could glow with that knowledge. Jesus, here he was salivating and being a boy scout about it, and they'd obviously been talking behind his back about tossing him a bone.

Which was a phenomenally terrible idea. Or it would have been, if Billy wasn't thinking entirely with his dick now that he'd been given clearance. God damn, he couldn't believe this.

“Not here. On your bed,” Billy decided, shooting a look over at Steve, laughing at the happy groan from him. Jesus. His arms went around

Nancy, one arm under her thighs to scoop her up. She was so tiny it was easy as she shrieked and clung. He could feel how warm her bare thighs were against his arm. Her fingers pushed into his hair, and he smirked. That was always a girl's first move, and it was nice to know he hadn't lost his touch.

"Come on, Nance, gonna get you feeling so nice," Billy purred out, and stepped into their bedroom. He'd walked past it at least a dozen times by then, but he'd never crossed the threshold, never laid Nancy down bridal style so he could stand over her, watch her breath rise and fall quickly in her chest as he stripped off his shirt.

Billy glanced over when Steve lay down beside her. He kept expecting the guy to come to his senses, but he seemed just as excited to see this through as they did. A little smile tugged at Billy's lips when Steve leaned in and gave Nancy a kiss.

"Want me to help?"

"Mhm," she agreed, and Steve reached to help her slide her dress up and off. Nancy was so small and perfect that Billy was halfway afraid of breaking her. But he knew better. He knew just what kind of fire was burning under her surface, and he'd have better luck snapping steel.

He let his rough hands glide up her soft belly, instead, squeezing her breasts through the gauzy pale material of her bra. She had pert little tits. She'd never tried to hide that or pad them up, and Billy grinned when she showed them to him, tossed off her bra and kicked off her panties with happy abandon. Her hands pulled at his hair, again guiding him there to mouth over her, where he bit a soft little trail between her nipples as she shivered, sighed and spread her legs more. So inviting that it would be rude for Billy not to settle between

them.

He pushed them more, open wider than she spread, to accommodate what he had to assume was the width difference between him and Steve. His hand covered her mound and he could hear *Steve* groan quietly. Billy laughed, biting at Nancy's nipple and sucking before popping off, making her squirm.

"Seeing as how you're being *so* damn generous, Stevie boy. Maybe I could *show* you a few things. What do you want me to do?" he asked, laughing when Steve's mouth opened and closed. Speechless. "Can't think of anything, huh?"

"Just, uhm." Steve finally found his words. "Your mouth, man. On her?"

"You want me to eat her out, huh?" Billy smirked, his thumb slowly gliding up Nancy's lips, slick and soft, and each little rub was making her breathing quicken.

"*She* does, too." Nancy pulled at his shoulders. Billy on top of her was intimidating for half a moment. Steve was tall, taller than Billy even, by a hair, but he didn't have the same powerful presence Billy had. He didn't smirk the same way, and *wink* down at her of all things, making her want to giggle and roll her eyes at the same time. "Come

on, I can't think of a better use for that mouth," she whispered, running her thumb slowly across Billy's bottom lip.

She grinned a little when he kissed the pad of her thumb. "Gotta give the lady what she wants, I guess," he teased. His tone was playful, and, Nancy hoped, happy.

She couldn't focus on that thought, though, because Billy's mouth was on her, after. Her entire body quivered when his tongue slipped over her lips. She sighed out a soft "*Oh*" and reached down to part them with her fingers. Her finger circled around her clit and she moaned, giggled, and then gasped when Billy's tongue licked around her.

"Move it, I'm working, Nance," he complained. She could hear the smirk in his tone, and had started to retort when his plush lips gently worked past her finger, the softest suck and she was putty. Her hand slipped up to grab his hair, instead, and she whined, rocking at him.

"Better, baby." He was muffled now, working her up. Every lick just got her wetter. He lapped over her hole, pressing his tongue inside in lazy pushes as his thumb took over the job on her clit. Billy had clearly done this a lot in the past, and Nancy was more than happy to reap the benefits of experience. Her body pulsed and sparked as she rode his tongue, crested through an orgasm that left her shaking and tugging hard at his curls. It had a way of making her want more, and if that made her greedy, well so be it.

“Come on, I want you, don’t keep me waiting.” Nancy gave her best pout, and Steve wanted to kiss it off her face, but now wasn’t the time. He handed Billy a condom, instead, and the man rolled it on with practiced ease. He watched Billy guide himself against her pussy, swallowing hard at the sight. Nancy pushed up with her hips, helping to ease him inside as her lips parted into a soft little cry of pleasure.

Steve knew exactly what she felt like after he’d had his mouth on her for a while, so soft and wet. So perfect. Now Billy knew, too. He could see it, the way his fingers gripped onto her thighs, a low groan as he pushed in deeper, filled her up until they were both sighing out together. It was complete in a way that kept Steve’s gaze utterly transfixed on them as he shoved his own jeans down and off, getting a hand around his leaking cock.

“God, Nance. Keep your knees up a little, Nance. *Yeah*. That’s good, like that?” Billy’s voice was breathy, and Steve watched his eyes close, his jaw loosen, lips parting, lost in how good Nancy felt inside. A slow curl of his hips, and he was moving inside of her, his strong hands holding the backs of her thighs to keep her how he wanted her. Billy Hargrove was fucking his wife, and Steve was so turned on he couldn’t remember how to *breathe*.

“*Mm*—It’s good, *yeah*,” Nancy whispered, squirming under the tight hold Billy had on her thighs. Steve didn’t usually pin her down like that, didn’t go *quite* as hard as Billy had worked up to now, every stroke *wet* in his ears, messy. “*Yeah, baby, it’s good*.” Her hand dropped down on the bed, searching for Steve’s to hold tight. They’d left the TV on in the other room, and Steve could hear the hazy distant shouting from the crowd ticking down the ball drop.

Four

“Uh-huh.” Nancy’s voice was high and soft. Her back arched, and she threw her other arm around Billy as her lips parted in low cry.

Three

Steve held onto her, his other hand still on his dick, wet and hypersensitive as he pumped himself in time to Billy’s own stroke, to the way Nancy wantonly pushed her hips up to meet it. He watched her come again, a second round that had her mewling and pushing up against Billy’s cock, riding it harder through her orgasm.

Two

Steve had to kiss her. *Had* to. He surged closer on the bed. Nancy’s mouth was open, her bottom lip trembling when he sealed their lips together into a kiss. He could hear Billy’s low groan just beside him, a swear, and Nancy’s small body was being pushed a little higher up the bed with a final jerk of Billy’s hips. He could hear the distant, excited cheers from the TV, the bang and pop of fireworks.

One

“Happy New Year, Nance,” Steve whispered out against her lips. Billy was panting behind him. Steve felt his curls tickle his shoulder, and

pulled back a little sheepishly. He hadn't meant to really interrupt.

"Sorry..." His voice trailed off as looked back and caught himself staring. There was a sheen of sweat on Billy's forehead. His eyes were closed, and his hands were rubbing over Nancy's knees as he caught his breath. One blue eye opened, then the other followed. He bit his bottom lip, giving Steve a little smirk.

"What are you talking about? Married, aren't you?"

Steve laughed and, well, he couldn't argue that. Billy slipped free and sat back, dragging his hands through his hair to tame it back more with a satisfied sigh.

"Oh my god," Nancy breathed out, sounded pleasantly dazed. Steve reached out to brush his fingers across her inner thigh. Billy had gotten her so wet she was damp there, too, and he could feel her still twitching. God, it was sexy. He reached for her, greedily sweeping her up and hugging her against his body.

"Good?"

"*Mmhmm,*" Nancy agreed contently, earning a short chuckle from Billy.

"Another satisfied customer." He laughed more when Nancy pushed her toes at him. "Alright, alright... So, uh, I gotta ask, was that a one time show, or, what?"

Steve blew out a breath of a laugh. They all seemed higher, more giddy than when they'd smoked, earlier. Lighter. Happy. "I think, like, there could be some encores? Or like, a regular matinee."

"Running. Engagement," Nancy mumbled against Steve's chest, making him laugh and kiss her again. God, he loved her so much it almost hurt. He didn't understand how he could want her so bad, but still *love* what he had just seen. How Billy touching her, her touching him back, gasping and clinging to him, had only made him want her more. How he could grin at Billy right now, watch the other man shake his head and start to stand up. Try to leave them.

"You can stay," Steve blurted out. "Bed's big enough."

Nancy lifted her head, nodding in agreement when it looked like Billy was going to head out anyway with a shake of his head. "I'll be sad if you don't. I'll think you're done with me."

"Now, see? Now you're hurting my wife's feelings..." Steve teased.

"Well, Jesus, that's manipulative as shit." Billy laughed. "Can't a guy at least take a piss?"

"Mhm. I guess." Nancy lay her head back down. "But come back."

"Alright, alright." Billy waved her off and started making his way to their bathroom naked.

Steve looked down, noticing Nancy peeking, and gave her a nudge.
“What?”

“His *ass*.” Nancy giggled, and Steve started laughing with her. It *was* pretty unreal. He kissed her, her body still so warm from everything Billy had done to it.

“Love you,” she murmured into the kiss, her toes wiggling against his leg. He loved her, too, told her as much, a little private declaration before Billy slipped back into the room. He’d cleaned up, hair pulled back to sleep, something Steve had seen when he’d left it up to make them breakfast. It was nice. He paused at the side of the bed, clearly not sure if whatever moment they’d been having was done, now, and if they still wanted him there.

Steve patted beside Nancy invitingly, and she twisted enough to reach for Billy’s arm, tugging.

“It’s bedtime. Come here...” She sat up, pulling Billy down to her level so that she could steal a kiss. It was soft, sweet, as her arms circled around him. It sure had Billy frozen, his hands were in the air until they finally went to her shoulders, slowly rubbing the bare skin there as he sighed against her lips. “Night Billy.” Nancy smiled and rubbed her thumb over his cheek after, lying back down.

“Sure, Nance... night.” Billy’s voice was strangely quiet, and he lay out beside her. He looked over at Steve, as if Nancy kissing him was somehow gonna be worse than his dick inside of her. Steve almost laughed, but, like, it was fine. So he just settled into the bed, instead. Nancy was happy, clearly. So was he, so that was all there was to it. She stretched out and stole Billy’s hand to wrap around her waist while she slept. Steve was still awake by the time her breathing

evened out, and even in the dim light, he thought Billy was, too. The suspicion was confirmed when he heard his low voice.

“You really good, Harrington? ...We really good?”

“Huh?” Steve blinked, confused, and then a little smile tugging at his lips. Billy's worry was kind of sweet in a way he'd never tell him.
“Yeah, I'm good. We're good. Promise.”

There was enough silence after that that Steve thought Billy had finally gone to bed. He'd closed his own eyes before he heard a whisper he wasn't entirely sure Billy actually meant for him to hear.

“You know... I don't think I'll ever understand you.”

“What's that mean?” Steve wondered, sitting up more and peering over Nancy. In the dark, he could just make out Billy's blue eyes reflecting back at him.

“I just don't think I could do what you just did with someone.”

“Well, you aren't just someone, Billy.” Steve shrugged, settling back to close his eyes again.

6. Chapter 6

Billy had promised to take Max to get new sneakers early the next day, and he'd made a quicker exit than usual, just a quick goodbye and a promise he'd be back on Friday. He worried their next dinner was going to be awkward. He had them buy groceries to make Steve's favorite chicken and rice dish. It wasn't a *peace* offering, just... a reminder of why they liked having him over.

"Smells good, honey," Nancy murmured, painting her nails at the kitchen table. The woman loved painting her nails herself, and Steve's, if he was in range. Billy had learned quickly to keep his hands away from her when the bottle was out. She'd already gotten his toes a couple of times at the couch. The first time, he'd freaked out once he realized what was happening, and stormed silently to the bathroom with a sick feeling in his stomach. If Neil ever saw... But Neil was never going to see. Neil was dead and gone, and he wasn't barefoot anywhere but his own home and theirs... He'd calmed himself down, muttering an excuse about a stomach ache before he put his toes back in her lap to finish the job.

Today, Nancy had picked him up from the site like nothing was out of the ordinary, like he didn't know what her pussy tasted like now, or how warm her pouty lips felt against his. She'd just smiled and reminded him it was her turn to pick the radio station.

When Steve came home, he walked right over to kiss Nancy. Then he groaned happily. "Oh my god, the chicken thing?"

"The chicken thing." Billy snorted, stirring the pot.

“Nancy, it's the *chicken thing*.”

“Nancy, I'm going to stop making him the chicken thing,” Billy retorted, biting the inside of his cheek to hold back a laugh. Things were ok. Nothing felt weird. This felt just how it was supposed to. He got into a 'heated argument' with Steve over whether or not he was going to make Steve 'the chicken thing' ever again if he didn't stop calling it that, while Nancy giggled from the sidelines.

Steve won. Only because of his stupid puppy eyes when he thought Billy actually might not make the dish again. He was weak. God damn it. He grumbled to himself while Steve happily set the table. When he sat down Nancy leaned in, gave his cheek a little kiss, and then a little further, a tiny peck on the lips. It was nothing, it didn't even linger, but it was something about how *casual* it was, how simply intimate, that it took Billy by surprise, made him freeze.

“Oh... Hey.” He smiled dumbly. He wanted to kick himself, then Steve, because his stupidity was clearly ruining him. “...We doing that?”

“Hey.” Nancy didn't seem to mind the dumb look on his face. Steve was grinning. That stupid grin that lit up his whole damn face and put Billy at ease. “I like it. You?”

Billy nodded, taking a bite of food. Billy didn't have relationships. He had conquests, or he did. Truth was, Nancy's pussy was the first one he'd been in longer than he'd admit. Sure, he'd plowed through as much of it as he could after he was out of the hospital, but for one, his heart hadn't liked it too much so soon, and for two, he knew at least that when he undressed in front of the two of them, they weren't going to ask what fucked up his chest. They could just appreciate

how damn good he looked.

And Nancy could kiss him. She could kiss him so casual, like they were back in high school and somehow going steady. Billy could laugh at the idea. Like they *ever* would have looked at each other back then. That was fine. Past didn't matter, not when just a little smile and a kiss to his temple when she got up to clean her plate could make his head spin.

They didn't have sex that night. Well, that was only partly a lie. Nancy had winked at Steve and slid her hand across Billy's lap slowly during a boring part of their show. Her hand grazed over his cock in a way that was clearly intentional. She looked up at him with innocent eyes when he groaned.

"Come on, don't be a tease," Billy complained, as close to asking for some as he was gonna get. Steve laughed.

"Be nice, Nance."

"I was gonna..." Her quick fingers slipped his pants down soon after and she stroked him slowly. He could feel two pairs of eyes on him as she did it. He dropped his head back onto the couch and let her play with his dick however she liked. Ended up coming from a real good twist of her thumb. She'd kissed his panting mouth playfully and went to wash her hands.

She took both of his hands after, pulling at them to try and pull him off the couch. Billy laughed. Because if that wasn't a sight.

“You need some help?” He circled his hands around her wrists, instead, and gave a little tug. One shriek later, and he had a lapful of her, complete with a pout.

“Making you do it next time, Steve.”

“Like he can do it, either,” Billy scoffed.

“Hey, they make us do emergency drills every year for site inspections,” Steve said confidently. “I can totally fireman’s carry you.” He stood up, and Billy sat right on back further on the couch, using Nancy as a shield. No way.

Nancy wisely intervened, twisting in Billy’s arms. “Lay down with us again. You’re warm.”

So Billy slept in their bed, lay down beside Nancy and tried to remember if he’d actually ever just *slept* beside someone else. He listened to Steve’s soft breathing and felt Nancy squirm to get more comfortable between them. He wondered how he’d ever go back to sleeping alone when he wasn’t there.

It didn’t escape Nancy’s attention that her boys never really interacted physically. They were all smiles and playful banter together, loved spending the time. She’d see them dip in to almost hug and then draw

back, see how sometimes when they talked their fingers would twitch or neither one of them seemed to know where to put their hands, so they usually ended up on Nancy. Even when they were lying in bed together, there was no jealousy, clearly they enjoyed seeing each other, watching, but there seemed to be an invisible force field keeping them both apart.

Nancy wondered if the only time they'd ever touched each other had been with their fists.

She tried to let them find their way to each other on their own. She wasn't exactly selfish, *and* she also definitely wasn't naive about the way her boys looked at each other. Nancy had known the first time that Steve had talked about his dream that Nancy wasn't the *only* person turning him on in it. That had been fine with her, of course. It would be so silly and hypocritical if she was the only one who was allowed to have them both. She *thought* they'd catch up on their own... Figure things out.

They didn't.

So. When they were too thick headed about it, she realized she'd need to help them along.

Movie night was the simplest approach. Except movie night was almost *every* night there. Billy was over their house more often than not. His clothes were in their laundry, they had bought him a coffee mug imprinted with a California license plate, and a pile of his records had migrated to a constant little stack on the coffee table.

He was an integral part of their lives, and that definitely included their sex life. She'd had him on the couch now, in the bed several times, and once at work on the desk with Steve watching and listening to make sure no one came into the office for a question. He'd watched her with Steve, quiet at first, like he wasn't sure he was supposed to see, then he was happy to offer commentary, egg Steve on and reach out to touch over her skin while Steve moved inside of her. It was all perfect in ways words couldn't describe, but she knew it could be even better.

Billy was always on the couch with them now. He'd stretch out beside her, feet up on the coffee table. He loved to touch. Once he figured out she didn't mind, his hand was always on her thigh, her knee, her hand. Tactile. Attention starved like her Steve, but from different traumas.

Nancy squeaked when the warm hand on her thigh started to drift *higher*, a single long finger slipping across the seam on her panties. She should have known better than to wear a skirt around him. She swatted him playfully and took his hand, ignoring his unrepentant chuckle. What good would a scolding even do? Billy knew he had free reign to touch, and they knew just what they'd given him.

"Shoo, fly. I actually want to *watch* this one." She laughed and pulled his hand up, kissing across his knuckles. "Think you can keep this out from between my thighs for another half hour?"

"I mean, I'm not making any promises..."

"Baby, you know what you're asking," Steve chimed in, and Nancy laughed more.

“Don't enable him... Fine. Here.” She took her chance, reaching for Steve's hand and joining it with Billy's on her lap, encouraging them to lace their fingers.

“What...” Steve sounded surprised, staring down at their hands together.

“Now you're responsible for him,” she said simply. “Don't let go until the movie is over.”

Billy didn't say anything, not a peep or even a dirty little comment she was getting *all* too used to these days. His eyes were on their hands, too. Nancy thought it was a nice sight. She leaned to give Billy a little kiss, and turned to do the same for Steve, before she settled back to watch the movie.

Those hands didn't leave her lap even after the credits rolled.

She noticed the simple effect it had over the next week. Like a little seed had been planted. A realization just now met that they *could* touch. That she didn't have to be the only conduit between them. She caught them leaning in closer to each other, now. Billy would lightly bump Steve's shoulder playfully while they were joking around. Steve would lean intently into Billy's space, a distracted hand on Billy's knee as he placed so much focus on the other man that, in that moment, the rest of the world was forgotten.

On the couch, their private little oasis. Steve would stretch his arm

out, across Nancy's back. His hand would brush Billy's shoulders. His finger would twirl idly into a curl, finding its home there as they listened to records, his other hand tapping a beat onto Nancy's thigh.

Billy smelled nice. Steve had known that for a long time, on some level. But he thought about it, now.

Nancy had gone out shopping with her mother, had left them to their own devices, so after dinner they decided to watch the worst horror movie they could rent. They spent over an hour at the video store hemming and hawing until they came home with the crowning glory. It had been awful and funny, and it had made them both happy to enjoy it together. Billy sat closer, and so had he. No buffer between them as their legs touched. Billy had leaned back and yawned, tired from the day, and Steve had been still as his shoulder had suddenly become a pillow. It was an action done so often with Nancy that it took him a moment to even consider the difference.

When Billy's head was on his shoulder, he could smell him more, a soft cloud of cologne and his own musk. He thought about it a *lot*. Sometimes, he thought about it when Billy wasn't around. When it was just him and Nancy for a night, or when he was alone in their office.

It wasn't his fault or anything. Billy was just easy to think about. There were a lot of things he liked about him. So he thought about him a lot. Thought about how he looked when he smiled at him. He thought about how he looked when he touched Nancy. That was just something he couldn't get enough of.

He just *really* liked watching Billy's strong hands pet up Nancy's perfect calves, her soft thighs, and the little curve of her hips. It was mesmerizing to watch Billy's mouth, pink and shining with Nancy's juices, when his head was squeezed between her thighs. He'd lick them clean or Nancy would press her soft lips against Billy's, and he'd think about how nice that must feel.

Oh.

Oh.

"Nancy... I think I want to kiss Billy," Steve whispered, out of the blue, one night before bed, part revelation, part wonder, just a little horror mixed in because he wanted to kiss a *man* and he wasn't even *that* scared of it. Not really. Because it was Billy. Maybe that was all it needed to be.

"Mhm, I know, honey." Nancy's tone was patient. She closed the book she'd been reading and set it aside before she leaned over to kiss his cheek. "I knew you'd catch up eventually."

"Wait, you knew? Oh no, does *he* know?"

"Steve," she laughed, "I don't know, I'm not a mind reader."

"Yes you ARE!" he accused.

“Steven!” Nancy giggled harder. “Stop, stop.”

Steve huffed. “Ok, ok.” He stopped, for about 5 seconds, before continuing. “...That's ok, right?”

“What's ok?”

“That I want to, uh, kiss him. You know?” Steve tried not to sound flustered over it, but this was all *very* new, and he didn't know how he felt about it, let alone how Nancy might.

Nancy leaned up and kissed just behind his ear, making him shiver. “Stevie. You know how you feel when you watch me and Billy, right?”

“Yeah...”

She pulled back to give him a pointed look.

“Oh. Oh wait, *really*?” Steve flushed, curious and warm all at once. It wasn't like he didn't know his wife thought he was attractive. It was just more he didn't think of himself as like... A show someone might like to watch.

“*Really*, Stevie. You think about that.” Nancy told him with a sweet little kiss before she turned off the bedside lamp.

Steve was acting a little weird. Weird was kind of his MO, but it was different. He was watching him more. Billy could feel Harrington's eyes on him more often than not, and it wasn't like the other guy was trying to *hide* it even. But that was fine with Billy.

Billy liked to show off. He *really* liked to show off for Steve. There was just something about those doe eyes staring at him. Something about how it felt to know that the lust that was making it hard for Harrington to even breathe, let alone manage a full sentence, was something that he had a hand in causing.

If he was honest, it was something hard to ignore. That he loved taking a man's breath away.

But, it was Steve. Maybe he didn't have to let himself read endlessly into it. He didn't have to hear his father's accusations in his ears every time he caught himself looking at Steve's pink lips. Every time he noticed how soft his hair was, or how nice it felt when they leaned into each other and watched a show, how sometimes Steve would move from holding his hand and accidentally brush over his thigh...

Maybe it could just be easy because it was Steve.

"I want to kiss your dumb husband's face, Nance," Billy whispered, and it *was* in horror because he hadn't really meant to blurt it out like that. That was Steve's shtick. He was spending way too much time here. He hadn't meant to. He'd just been sitting there thinking about

everything with them, and it just came out.

Nancy hummed, setting down the clean sheets she'd been folding with him. "Mhm. I know, Billy, honey. I knew you'd catch up eventually."

"Well, shit, Nancy. You could have told me sooner!" he accused a little. It wasn't like the woman didn't tell him exactly what she wanted. But, he guessed this wasn't exactly about what *she* wanted.

Nancy just shrugged and had to hop onto her toes to tuck away one of the last folded sheets into the top of the closet. Cute. Plus, it made her little tits bounce in the loose shirt she was wearing, but he wasn't going to let it distract him today. Mostly.

He ended up pulling her in front of him, where he sat on the bed, sliding her shirt up and pressing a kiss to her sternum. "Nancy Wheeler, fucking gatekeeper of secrets," he muttered, pink tongue peeking out quick to stroke over her nipple. He smirked when it pebbled quickly under his tongue, and she gasped, wrapping her arms around his head to keep him right there.

"...Does he?" he asked, worrying the petal soft bud between his teeth. She squirmed and pulled at his hair.

"No *fair*, ask him yourself."

"*M'asking* you." He bit down and made her gasp.

“And—ah, I’m telling you ask *him*,” Nancy sighed out. Maybe he would. Later. Right now he planned on making Nancy forget about the laundry.

Nancy had other ideas, though. Oh, she didn’t want Billy to take his hands off of her. No one was saying that had to happen, but she knew she wanted this settled now. Not on the boys’ time. She didn’t want to wait all year for them to fumble around it. Steve had bad timing, going into work on a Saturday. Billy had told him he was a loser, and Nancy had given her best pout, but there were inspections coming up, and Steve went into quiet panic whenever they happened. Spent extra hours inspecting the site, and the rest of the time poring over plans and blueprints in the trailer with team members to make sure they were dotting every ‘i’ and crossing every ‘t’.

They were going to have to mess that up.

Nancy wound her slender arms around Billy’s shoulders. She sat in his lap to face him, cotton panties the only thing she’d slipped on under one of Billy’s shirts. He hadn’t said anything, but she’d heard the little intake of breath when she’d casually pulled on the threadbare hair metal band shirt to do housework with him. He liked it. “*Let’s call him*,” she suggested in a little whisper against his ear. “Make him realize how important it is that he comes home right now.”

“Damn, I love the way you think, baby girl.” Billy’s shoulders shook a little with laughter, and he pulled back to look at her with a wicked grin. “If I had known before...” His thought was cut off into a low

groan when Nancy ground her hips against him.

“You know now, that's what's important, right? Hand me the phone.”

7. Chapter 7

Steve glanced down at the new nifty little 'Caller ID' thingy they'd decided to get for the office phone. He recognized the home number, and smiled at Jonesy and Pete, asking them to wait a moment before he answered.

"Hey, Nancy I know, I said I'd come home soo—..."

"Harrington."

Steve's placating was cut short. Billy's voice was gravel low through the receiver. He licked his lips when he could hear Nancy's soft exhale follow.

Oh shit. Steve licked at his lips again, his entire mouth suddenly dry, and there were way too many people in his office.

"Yeah?" His voice cracked. He was doomed.

"Stevie, come home, baby," Nancy's breathy voice whispered, and a little moan followed. The leather creaked in Steve's seat as he shifted desperately to adjust for all of the blood rushing down to his cock. "Come on, we're ready for you."

“We?” A squeak this time. That was so much worse.

“We, pretty boy. Come home.”

Click.

Shit.

“You alright there, boss?” Pete asked, but there was an amused look in his eye. It made Steve start to babble, trying to think of a good excuse to suddenly be cutting out. Because he was definitely cutting out.

“No, I mean, yes. It's just...The uh... washing machine. It caught on fire. I mean! It's all good. Nothing is still on fire. Everything is un-on fire now. But I have to...-” He stopped, watching the amused disbelief on both men's faces. And he laughed at himself, because this was stupid. He wasn't in high school trying to get a hall pass. He raked his hands through his hair, instead, and stood up to grab his jacket. “Ok, no. You know what? I'm the boss. So I'm just gonna go home and see my wife naked. You guys get out of here, too, alright? Lock up behind you.”

He didn't wait for an answer, but a grin pulled at his lips when he could hear their entertained laughter as he closed the door and went straight for his car.

Record time. That's how he made it home. *We.* Did Billy mean... They

were almost always together now when one of them was with Nancy, but it was *how* he said it. The possibilities were making him dizzy and he took a fortifying breath before he stepped inside of his own home, walking to the bedroom.

There was an abandoned pile of laundry on the vanity chair, and two warm bodies in his bed. Nancy was pink all over, hair wild and the t-shirt she was wearing pushed up past her thighs. He knew what his wife looked like when she'd just been eaten out, and he was a little sad to have missed it.

Billy was leaning against the headboard, completely buck ass naked, lips pinker, shining still and smirking at him in satisfaction. Steve forgot about breathing for a few seconds while he brain caught up with them. Billy seemed to like that, if his widening smirk was any indication.

“Bout time. Come here.”

“Yeah, yeah, you know it's like a long drive, right?” Steve muttered, tossing off his coat onto the chair and tugging his belt off to at least start to catch up.

“Shoulda stayed home.” Nancy reached for his hand the second it was in her range, pulling him onto the bed with her. “Stupid meetings.” Her pout said it all as he leaned in to kiss her, Billy right beside him, his steady breathing in Steve's ear as he leaned closer.

When Nancy pulled back from their kiss, Steve felt himself leaning over. Leaning in. So close to Billy he could feel the warmth of his

skin. When he breathed, his breath fanned over his cheek. He gave him a faint smile, starting to draw back, aware he was too close, and then Billy's hand was on his shoulder, gripping into his shirt sleeve. The look he was giving him was exasperated, amused. His eyes were warmer than such chilly blue ever had a right to feel. It kept Steve locked into place, just his startled breathing. Just Billy staring and inches away from him. In each other's space as Billy's thumb rubbed into the material of his shirt.

“So... You gonna fucking kiss me or what?”

Oh.

“I wasn't sure if like, you'd want to...” Steve's voice trailed off, but he smiled at him, a fleeting shy flip of his stomach chasing it. “I mean, I know we're friends like... Ok, we're friends, but we're not friends. You know? Like *more* than that? Or at least, that's how it feels to me. I don't know how it feels to you... Or I didn't... I wasn't sure.”

“Yeah, well, I guess I'm better at hiding my feelings about you than you thought, Harrington,” Billy spat out with a cocky smirk, tongue pressed to the back of his teeth.

“Shut up.” Steve pushed at his shoulder. The room was definitely too hot. The weather couldn't make up its mind, so the heat was up too high, and Billy's eyes were on his mouth.

“It's nice.” Nancy watched his gaze. Her fingers were touching the top of Billy's hand, tracing across his knuckles, encouraging. “His lips are soft.”

“Big surprise.”

“Hey, I—” Steve's retort died on his lips, completely gone from his head before Billy was leaning forward on the bed. Billy's mouth was on his, warm, stubble brushing his skin. His tongue was in his mouth, and he could taste Nancy on it, and he forgot how to breathe. He forgot how to do anything but whimper and reach up to cling onto Billy's shoulders. He'd thought about how Nancy must have felt when Billy kissed her dozens of times, maybe that should have told him something, but he'd been too busy being horny for things to click.

“Wow,” Nancy breathed out beside him, clearly impressed.

“Wow,” Steve whispered out, equally impressed. Billy laughed, tongue dipping out past his bottom lip as he pushed a hand over Steve's mouth. “How the hell am I attracted to both of you? Life isn't fucking fair.”

“Too fucking, bad.” Steve laughed, his hand gripping onto his shoulder, pulling him back in for another kiss. How much time had they been wasting not doing this?

Nancy watched them with a prideful grin. Hot, and kind of messy, like neither of them quite knew how to contend with the scruff on each other's face. Well, they could both find out about beard-burn on their own. Penance for how often she was left feeling it on her chin and thighs.

She wasn't about to warn them and risk them stopping. No way. She scooted up onto her knees and wrapped her arms around Steve from behind, rubbing her hand over his chest as she popped her chin onto his shoulder to watch closer.

One of Steve's hands was still holding Billy's shoulder, rubbing against his skin, feeling over the strong muscle there. Nancy could relate. His other hand went to push at his pants, and he made a frustrated noise when he couldn't get them open and hold onto Billy at the same time.

"I've got it, don't worry." She kissed behind his ear, reaching down to help work his zipper and push them down, help ease the pressure he had to be feeling. She smiled at the sigh the action got, the little mumbled 'thanks, Nance' against Billy's mouth that had Billy chuckling and finally pulling back to catch his breath.

"Yeah. Lot of wasted time not kissing this pretty mouth." He agreed, voice rough, already worked up from having his mouth on her while they waited for Steve.

"Thanks." Steve laughed and shook his head to clear it before he pressed it against Billy's. "So I... Kinda don't know what to do, now. With parts. You know?" he admitted openly, quickly. "We've got the kissing down. And that's really nice, but like if you've got ideas..."

"Shit. I was kinda hoping just to touch you for a while." Billy laughed with him.

"Cool. Ok. Yeah. That's definitely cool." Steve bobbed his head in quick agreement, and it made Nancy want to squeeze him tighter. She gave into the temptation, then helped him with his shirt, instead, so he could finally be as bare as Billy was on the bed.

Steve figured if Billy could touch him he was allowed to touch back. Like, that was fair. He ran his hand down a chest that he had practically memorized the view of. But he hadn't known how it would *feel*, and he wanted to memorize that just as much. Billy's skin was paler from the winter, but there was no denying the kiss of summer still lingering there. Cali sun, baby. No amount of years in Indiana could zap it from his skin. His fingertips skimmed across the scars over his heart, slippery soft and catching on the edges as he shamelessly squeezed one of his pecs and listened to Billy grunt quietly in response, watched him lick his lips slowly. Jesus, he was so sexy, and Steve couldn't stop touching him.

It felt like his first time touching Nancy. Not physically, but there had been something that thrummed under his skin, from his fingers all the way down to his bones that told him that the moment was *special*. He never thought he'd feel that sensation again. It put a giddy smile on his face, which made Billy snort and look away.

No way, though. They weren't done. Steve happily pulled him back to face him, kissed him again, felt Billy's strong body go soft for him when their lips touched. Billy liked when he kissed him. When his hand slipped down to his abs, he could feel his skin shiver and the muscle there contract and dip. How did Nancy not get drunk with power when she did this? Maybe she did. Who could blame her; Steve felt like he was holding down pure electricity against his palm.

"Alright, alright, my turn, Harrington," Billy grumbled under him, not to be left out. His arms around Steve were a surprise, and the sudden roll so that it was *his* back against the bed made his eyes go wide and a flash of heat go straight to his groin. He'd seen Billy use that move a dozen times now on Nancy, and now he knew how it *felt*.

The position was vulnerable. Billy was smirking down at him in a way that made his knees cinch up against the other man's hips not sure entirely if his body was trying to keep Billy away or make him stay right where he was. His stomach dipped in time with Billy leaning down to take another kiss. He didn't stop at his mouth, those lips making their way down his collarbone and across his shoulders. It was a pattern Steve recognized, one that made him smile. Billy was kissing across the smattering of freckles decorating his skin.

"That's nice." Steve touched into the soft hair at the nape of Billy's neck, his own voice low as he looked down the expanse of his back, gasping quietly when Billy went from 'cute' to sucking one of his nipples between his lips, teeth digging into the tender bit of flesh.

"Fuck- *ah, baby*," Steve whispered, voice husky, and it went straight to his Billy's dick. Baby. He liked that. Liked Steve squirming around under him on the bed, like he didn't know what to do with himself just yet. Billy didn't know, either, but he was willing to figure it out for them both. He ended up shifting his position, hips lowered until his own cock was resting against Steve's, and then he had them both in hand, grinning at the low moan the action got.

Steve's cock was leaking, precome was already smearing Billy's thumb, and it didn't feel weird like he'd worried. It felt good, silky

skin and Steve's squirming was making them move against each other with a delicious bit of friction. He figured they just needed...

"Here." Nancy held out a bottle of lotion, and Billy laughed.

"You're perfect, Nance."

"Uh-huh." Nancy clicked open the cap for him and helped squeeze a little onto his hand before she kissed his cheek. "Keep going."

"Yeah, keep going," Steve piped in. He pushed his hips up in a slow roll, his cock rubbing against Billy's and his now slick hand. God damn. That was nice. Billy nodded curtly and held them both, pumped his hand and groaned out with Steve between kisses over how damn good that felt.

He could hear Nancy moaning quietly beside them, glanced over and winked when he saw her hand had disappeared between her legs. "Think she likes it, Stevie."

"Think *I* like it." Steve laughed shakily. When he reached down between them Billy pushed his hand away.

"Nah, come on, I want to do it. You had your chance." Billy squeezed around them both, reveling in how Steve gasped and arched closer at the rougher handling. "Yeah, that's right, see? Gonna handle it. So don't try that again."

“Ok, *fuck*, ok.” Steve shivered and licked his lips. He was getting close, and Billy stroked them both faster, knowing all of Steve’s signs by now, but this time he wanted to see him coming for him.

Steve was beautiful. Billy had his eyes on him, watching his stomach muscles dip, his cock twitching hard in his hand. Steve’s jaw going slack, pink lips parted into a low cry that Billy swallowed up into a rougher kiss. It took Billy a little longer to chase that wave, a few more pumps of his own hand and he was shivering, his come slinging onto Steve’s belly to join the puddle the other man had left there.

“Mm, gross.” Steve barely caught his breath before he chuckled, running his hand through his hair, a content smile on his lips.

“I’ll have you know that my jizz is in high demand, Harrington.”

“Oh, no, Billy, that’s even grosser!” Nancy laughed, out of breath, and Billy just gave her a grin when she pushed lightly on his face.

“Get us a cloth?”

“Yeah let me wash up.” Nancy leaned in and gave them each a little kiss before she scooted off the bed. She came back with a washcloth and junk food, wiggling back in beside Steve and opening the bag for them. Billy mostly avoided the stuff when he wasn’t high, but gave in and took a handful of Doritos for himself.

“No second thoughts on that, Harrington?” Billy questioned, his head

on Steve's chest as he crunched into a chip. Nancy had taken the other side of him, all snuggled up contently and rubbing a warm hand over his knee. He flicked his eyes up to look into Steve's, who looked confused at the question even.

"What? No way. That was... Wait, you want to do it again, right? Because I don't know if I can *not* touch you now. Your thighs are otherworldly."

"Jesus." Billy snorted. "No. It was good. Just making sure you weren't getting it out of your system or something."

"Not a chance. You're too special for that, Billy Hargrove," Steve said softly, eyes focused completely on him, and it sounded like complete goop. Fuck, it made Billy *feel* like complete goop. God, he wanted to kill him, or kiss him again, or just...

He reached down and squeezed his hand so tight it had to border on being too tight. "Shut up," he finally muttered, far too late if the grin on Steve's face was anything to go by.

"Shutting up, *baby*. Pass me the chips."

"Oh my god, what are you doing here?" Max demanded the second Billy walked in the door. Billy grunted, making a point of rubbing his dirty hand on her face and listening to her shriek and avoid him.

“The hell you yacking about, Maxine?”

Max had managed to grab his hand with both of hers and was pushing against it as hard as she could. Physics were not on her side. “I mean, *William*, you’re never here anymore. In case you were wondering we *didn’t* miss you.” She huffed indignantly and Billy laughed, finally showing some mercy and pulling his hand back.

“If you didn’t miss me, then why you asking what I’m doing here, huh?”

“Cause I didn’t know I’d need to replace your weed this fast.”

“Oh, for fuck—”

“Kidding!” Max laughed and scooted over on the couch. “Watch the A-Team marathon with me.”

“You eat?” Billy asked, glancing at the TV. Max was right, he’d been away a lot lately, but whenever he was home, he tried to cook or prep a couple meals at once so that Susan wasn’t stuck doing all the cooking, and so that Max didn’t live entirely on bologna sandwiches, the extent of her culinary expertise.

“Yeah, there’s still some on the stove, if you’re hungry.”

Billy ended up fixing a plate of pot roast and dropping down onto the couch with her. “How’s school?” he asked around a bite of potato, just to watch her nose scrunch up.

“Fine, *mom*.”

Billy didn’t ask anything else, just waited a few moments before she suddenly twisted to look at him more. “Ok, so Mr. Jacobs said that, with the extra credit, I should ace the chemistry final, and he thinks —”

Billy held back a smirk, listening to her talk through almost an entire episode as she caught him up on each of her classes. The schools she wanted to apply to.

“Hey, thought you wanted to apply to University of Chicago, too, or whatever?” Billy set his plate down, finally speaking up when he realized it was missing on her list.

“Oh, yeah. Well, I mean the acceptance rates for them are like super low, and with the application fees—”

“Uh-uh. You’re applying.” Billy poked her right in her tiny nose. “Don’t make me fill out the form for you.”

“Oh please, can you even spell my name?”

“Har, har,” Billy shot back dryly. “I mean it, though. You’re going to apply, and not worry about the application fees. Got it?”

“Alright, geeze,” Max muttered and settled back. “That's the farthest one, you know, right? Should have known you'd try to make me ship out.”

“Yeah, yeah. You're onto me,” Billy agreed flatly. He was steadfastly trying to ignore that idea, actually. That Max was going to be just, living miles away from them with a bunch of strangers. Hated it. They could pretend to be sick of each other all they wanted, but he knew Max was nervous about it, too.

“You know I'm gonna come visit you, right?”

“Why?”

“*Why?* Cause I'm gonna miss you, you little shit, why else? Me and Susan will come bother you whenever we can, and you're gonna come down for all of the holidays or *else*.” He looked over at her threateningly before he looped an arm around her and squeezed her close. “Got that?”

“Ok, geeze, *fine*.”

“And... I'll try to be home more often, ok?”

“Me and Mom are just gonna start following you to Nancy's,” Max joked, and Billy snorted, settling back to watch more TV with her.

“She said that?” Steve laughed. Billy had gone home, which was fine and all, except that they missed him, and he was weak and ended up calling him a few hours after dinner while he fiddled around with reorganizing the record collection. “Well, you know, it’s not a bad idea. They’re always welcome to come over to dinner, too.”

“Don’t be weird, Harrington.”

Billy was clearly working out while he was on the phone with him. His breathing was heavier, and there was the occasional clink of metal weights. Steve wanted to point out how weird *that* was, not to mention probably ill advised. Also, it kind of turned him on? So maybe he’d just keep listening to Hargrove work out, no matter how silly the idea seemed after being on a construction site all day.

“It’s not weird, though. Max comes over all the time for movie nights with the gang. And it’s not like we don’t know Susan. It actually sounds pretty nice.”

There was a long silence over the phone, just the sound of Billy’s breathing.

“Might not be so bad.” he finally answered, which Steve knew was as close to an endorsement as he would get.

“I’ll tell Nancy. Just let us know when you’re bringing them, too.”

Steve ended the call not long after with a little smile. It was kind of ridiculous. Billy was... Well, they weren't really labeling what Billy was, but it felt more than a little like inviting a boyfriend's family over for dinner, and Steve had the feeling Nancy was gonna agree.

Billy had given the invitation offhandedly on a night he was home, soaping up the dishes in the sink from dinner and not looking. Because it was stupid, and he wanted to make sure that Susan had the chance to brush it off.

Susan looked up from balancing the checkbook. "That sounds nice. Should we bring anything?"

Billy paused mid-swipe over a dinner plate. "You don't have to go, if you don't want to, you know? If you're busy..." Sure she'd gone with him to work parties, but this wasn't really work related. He barely thought of Steve or Nancy as his boss, and sometimes he forgot other people might.

"Well..." Susan thoughtfully tapped the top of her pen against the corner of her mouth. "I think I can fit it into my *very* busy schedule. Let's see. I have dinner with the mayor, on Tuesday evening, I'm expecting an important call from Tom Selleck, Thursday. But maybe I can squeeze you in."

Billy bit his inner cheek to hold in a smile. "Alright, alright. I get it." Billy hadn't really known Susan could have a sense of humor before he got to actually know her more. Sometimes it still surprised him. "Bring your coleslaw. I don't think they've ever had it, and they don't

know what they're missing."

Max was suspiciously easy to convince. What was wrong with his family? Didn't they get that this was weird?

Fine. That was fine. Billy would make oven baked fried chicken and have a weird, awful, family dinner with Steve and Nancy to get the idea over with, and then he'd go back to keeping those worlds separate.

Except... That it seemed to be going perfectly.

Nancy laughed with Susan, they'd been discussing Susan's school life long after the dishes had been cleared away. Nancy had had no idea that Susan had taught dance classes during her summers off.

"Susan, you should really do it again, here. Maybe at the library after hours, or the school even. I bet lots of people would sign up. I would!" In all honesty, Nancy had never really considered dancing as something she'd be terribly interested in, but Susan made it sound so fun. The whole conversation had given her eyes a dreamy light to them, and Nancy wanted to encourage that. She'd definitely go.

"Oh... I don't know."

"We have a printer at in our office trailer. I'd help you make copies

and everything. I'll make each of the men take one home to their wives. Their wives will make them go." Nancy laughed, and Susan started laughing with her.

"Ok... ok, I'll think about it," Susan promised, sharing her smile.

Steve had been just as involved in a conversation with Billy and Max over what sort of leftover materials at the construction site they could use to build a skateboard ramp, or half pipe, or whatever she had called it. He honestly couldn't believe they hadn't thought of it before, but then, it wasn't too often that it was just Max around, and she was the only one of the group who was heavily into skateboarding.

"I'm telling you, there's enough wood, tubing, metal scrap... I don't care if you guys take it, it's just going to scrap, and Billy could do the welding to secure it more."

"I mean... It does sound really awesome." Max agreed, "but where exactly are we gonna *put* it, Harrington?"

"Shit, stick it in my back yard. Make it loop over into the pool, I don't care."

"We are *not* building a skateboard ramp to the pool, Steven," Nancy quickly vetoed the idea. "...But there's no reason it can't be in the backyard."

“Really?” Max perked up with more interest when it became clear this was more than just a vague idea. Steve grinned at her.

“You heard the boss. Sounds like the perfect project to me, huh, Billy?”

“Sure, hell, why not? But you're both helping me build it. I'm not the only one swinging a hammer over here.”

“Whoa, whoa, I changed my mind,” Steve joked, and then laughed more when Max playfully punched his shoulder.

“Not a chance. We're doing it,” she told him firmly, and Steve held his hands up in surrender.

“Call her off of me, Billy!”

“Not a change of that, either.” Billy laughed. He'd finally relaxed about halfway through dinner, and now he was looking over at Nancy and Susan with a little amused look on his face.

“What kind of no good are you two up to?”

“Oh, don't you worry about it,” Nancy said sweetly, and Susan

laughed, which was a nice thing to hear. After dinner, he stayed behind, watched to make sure they got out of the driveway ok, and turned to find Nancy right behind him.

"I really liked that," Nancy whispered, her arms wrapped all around Billy's solid shoulders. "Let's do it again."

"Yeah? Wasn't awkward?"

"Not even a little. Let's do it more, ok?"

Billy wasn't really sure why the idea sounded good and worried him at the same time. It felt like muddling things together, complicating them. When he was just seeing them, he didn't really think about anything else. Max was no dummy, and her mother wasn't, either. How long was it going to take for one of them to *really* look at the three of them together and realize something was different?

But Nancy was a hard girl to say no to. He brushed his fingers across her cheek. "Sure, sounds good."

"Nancy! Why. *WHY* is he taking his shirt off during lunch hours?"

"Maybe he's hot?"

"It's obscene. *He's* hot," Steve complained very loudly as he peered through the blinds. "Do you think he knows how god damn sexy he is when he's welding?"

"Oh yeah, definitely." Nancy had come up to the window beside him to get her peek. She sighed wistfully. "He's coming over tonight, right?" Susan and Max had come over last night again, but Billy had woefully gone home *with* them. He'd started to do that whenever they all had dinner together, like that would somehow make it less obvious about all of the times he *did* sleep over.

"I don't know. We didn't say, it's Tuesday..." Steve bit his bottom lip, sucking it shiny between his teeth before he released it. This was unacceptable. The state he was putting them both in. He *hated* never knowing if Billy would be in their bed or not that night. "He should just live with us."

Nancy paused. Having it said out loud felt like the most obvious thing either of them had ever said.

"You know... He *should*. Just live with us."

"... Why have we not thought of this before?" Steve asked, dumbfounded. "It's perfect."

"It really is," Nancy agreed quickly, and it definitely wasn't *only* because watching Billy out the window right then had her squeezing her thighs together.

Billy had those thighs shaking a few hours later, and he had Steve shaking all over with them. Blow jobs. They were kinda fun, and Nancy was happy to show him the ropes. Steve was happy to babble and moan, a lot. Billy licked his swollen lips clean and grinned, flopping back onto the bed beside them. He loved the quiet. Those moments of blissful afterglow and panting where it took all five minutes for Steve to start talking again.

Steven's head lolled to the side and he smiled at him with doe eyes that looked hazy and fucked out, still. "Hey. You know we love you, right?"

Seven minutes this time. New record.

He did. They'd never really said it, but they hadn't had to. It wasn't like in one of those movies where Billy was suddenly struck by those words and realization. Billy had felt their love build gradually, strongly, right in line with his own back to them, brick by brick until there was a shelter in his heart where he could keep it safe from all of the bad shit that still liked to lurk. Still. Hearing it out loud was its own kind of tender. It was nice.

"Obviously." Billy smirked, preening and running his hands through his curls to push them back into place.

He was just bad at saying it back.

Steve snorted and beat Nancy to leaning in to kiss him just to get the smug look off his face.

She smiled at the sight. “Billy. Live with us,” Nancy said quickly, because Steve Harrington was absolutely not the only person in this relationship to just blurt things out.

“Excuse me?” Billy pulled his lips back, frowning a little and ignoring Steve's huff of annoyance.

“Move in. You already have half of your things here.”

“Nance... That's.” Billy looked a little pained, clearly forcing a smile. “That's nice, but I can't.”

“Why not? I mean if you're worried what people will think you can just let them think you're renting out a room or whatever you want to tell them.”

“Since when do I care what other people think?” Billy lied through his teeth. “It's not that. Susan and Max need me at home. I pay half the bills there.” He knew Susan, he could try, but she'd never take his money towards anything if he wasn't still living there. They were all too damn proud in that household.

“Ok... So like. Do you guys really like that place?” Steve asked. “We do have the mother-in-law suite. It's nice, we'd just have to clean out the storage there...”

Billy swallowed hard at the offer. It was ridiculous. Like it was nothing for them to completely take in him and his whole family, just like that.

He scoffed. “Yeah, right. Just gonna sell the house and uproot Susan and Max, stuff them together in a mother-in-law suite.”

“Isn't Max going off to college soon? And besides, she could have the guest room,” Steve offered, and Billy shook his head. “You ain't listening. It's not happening.” It was a nice little pipe dream. A sweet offer. But there wasn't a chance of it working out.

“Just drop it. Alright?”

“Alright. Dropping it,” Steve placated. He shared a look with Nancy, who gave Billy's arm a little pat, before he finally relaxed back down, tried to forget that impossible little pipe dream and how hot his chest and face had felt while he was arguing it.

Suburbia was nice to dick around in, but he knew it wasn't a place he could ever *really* stay for good.

But hey. The sex was good, and the love wasn't so bad, so Billy couldn't see himself ever looking to quit the good thing they had going on.

8. Chapter 8

Steve tried not to feel so disappointed over how Billy had reacted to their offer. On some level, he understood. It was a really big step, but then, was it *really*? He'd just had to rummage through his own dresser drawer for a good five minutes to find a pair of socks that *wasn't* Billy's. The man had completely reorganized the kitchen to *his* liking, and it had taken both him and Nancy a week to figure out where the cereal bowls were. So like, him being weird over moving over his weights and like, the three pairs of clothes he kept at his house now seemed silly.

He shared the thoughts with Nancy while Billy took a nap. A nap in *their* bed. Steve pointed out that fact in a quiet, exasperated whisper.

“It just makes *no* sense. It’s the absence of sense!”

“Shh, I know,” Nancy agreed patiently, again. “He might change his mind, but we can’t make him, you know? Besides. It’s different.”

“I don’t see how,” Steve huffed, lying, because he wanted it to be easy. If Billy moved in, he really would have to tell Susan *something*. Like, she *wasn’t* stupid. If Steve’s parents were still alive, he wouldn’t have any idea how explain that, *this*, to them. Which...

“Hey, uh, Nance? What would you tell your parents if Billy *did* move in?” he suddenly wondered. Karen Wheeler found him tolerable, knew he and Nancy loved each other, and she cared about that... but Nancy’s dad and extended family didn’t care for him on the best of days, and he didn’t think he’d be too fond of Billy Hargrove, either.

“I guess I’d tell them to just add me to their weekly phone gossip chain like Meadow.” Nancy shrugged, and it made Steve tilt his head, look at her fondly. His girl, Ms. Nancy Wheeler, who didn’t give a shit what anyone thought of her.

“What?” She smiled back at him.

“Nothing, just loving you.” He grabbed for her hand, spinning her into his arms.

“Maxine. You wait any longer, and I’m opening them.”

Billy was getting tired of looking at the pile of envelopes that Max had been setting onto her desk after every mail delivery. All of them pristine and unopened.

It was driving him *crazy*. How was it not driving *her* crazy? *She* was driving him crazy. His hand started to drift towards the pile to take matters into his own hands.

“Don’t you *dare*,” Max threatened, smacking both of her hands down onto the letters firmly to shield them from him.

“For fuck’s sake, just *open* them, already.”

“Not yet. It's not time, yet.” Max shook her head, picking up the pile and holding it protectively to her chest.

“Well, what are you waiting for? A sign from god? I don't think we're getting any tornadoes or lightning strikes anytime soon, so fucking hand them over.” Billy snorted.

“No! It's just. I'm not ready yet.” Max frowned, looking at the pile. That had Billy confused. They'd been filling these out for *weeks*.

“How the hell are you not ready?”

“Just... What if I don't get into any of them?”

Oh. “Maxine. You're gonna get in.”

“But what if I *don't*, *William*? ”

“Alright, fine.” Billy shook his head. He'd entertain the idea if it would make all this shit stop. “If you don't, you'll find something else you like. Like a trade or something. It's great if you go, but college isn't the be-all end-all everyone makes it out to be.”

Max's face screwed up tight. She'd always been tough about it, but she was shit at hiding her emotions. “You wouldn't be...

disappointed?”

“Me? Well yeah, I guess a little, but only because I know you’d be. I didn’t go to college, either, you know?” He’d never even given the idea a thought. Sure he’d done fuck-all after school at first, but now he was doing good. He’d gotten his certification, and was bringing in some really decent cash, and he actually liked what he was doing. Go figure.

“But come on, this is stupid shit. At least one of these colleges isn’t a complete fucking moron and gave you an acceptance letter.”

“Ok... Ok.” Max sucked a deep breath of air into her chest and held out the envelopes splayed like a deck of cards. “Pick one.”

“Fucking finally!” Billy snapped a thick maroon and white envelope out of the pile, ignoring Max’s protests as he jammed his thumb under the ridge to break the seal and start ripping it open.

“Not that one!”

“Oh yeah, that one,” Billy retorted. He’d helped her fill out every damn one of these, and he knew which colors belonged to the one she wanted to get into the most.

The paper was crisp, heavy when he got it between his fingers. Felt important, and even he was feeling some damn butterflies as he read it, ignoring Max’s worried noises as she tried to reach for it.

“Come on, just let me—”

“You're in.”

“—Wait, what?”

Billy laughed happily, holding up the letter, letting her see the acceptance seal on it. “You're in, kid.”

Oh god *damn* Max could scream when she wanted to. He tossed the letter at her head and covered his ears. “”Alright, *alright*. I'm fucking happy for you, just shut up.”

“You shut up!” she said happily, tossing the other letters onto the desk as she looked over the one from The University of Chicago.

“Ain't you gonna open the rest?”

“No, I don't *care* about the rest.” Max gripped the letter tight in one hand, practically crumpling it as she flung herself against him in a hug.

Billy oofed a little, surprised by how much of a wallop she managed to pack into those hugs. His hand dropped down to her back, squeezing her a little closer. “So that's it. Gonna ship out after the

summer... be the end of an era I guess, huh?" He cleared his throat and let her go, grabbing her denim jacket and tossing it at her.

"Come on, Susan will be home any minute. We're going for ice cream."

"What am I, twelve?"

"You want fucking ice cream or not?"

"Yeah. Ice cream and a *beer*, or the weed I know you've got hidden around here somewhere," Max said pointedly, and god damn Billy was prouder than he should have been. "Look. After you and your weird little friends do you walk down across the gymnasium, I'll get you whatever you want. You can have your own rager. Do me proud."

"I am *definitely* holding you to that."

Max hadn't even had to. Billy had already been talking to Nancy about the kids' graduation, since she was getting all nostalgic about her little brother growing up. After some discussion, they'd decided it was smarter and a whole later safer to let the kids have their post-graduation party at the house.

Nancy did her absolute best to ignore the keg that they'd somehow procured, though her husband was her prime suspect, and the weed that Billy had definitely provided as a graduation gift to them all. Part of her wanted to squish her baby brother up and never let him go. They'd been rocky over the years, back and forth, love and hate, but she couldn't believe he was so grown *up* now. She watched them all together, laughing around the pool, splashing, partying, and she had to wipe at her eyes. Not everyone had made it in this town, over the years. But they had.

She wasn't the only one feeling nostalgic melancholy welling up in her chest. Billy had been DJ'ing most of the night, a boom box and a pile of cassette tapes stacked beside it while he drank from a red cup. Nancy saw him looking at Max quietly while the music played. She walked over to join him, brushing her skirt up to sit on edge of the plastic deck chair beside him.

“You've been quiet. Doing ok?”

“Yeah, just...” Billy tore his gaze away from the pool to look at her. “Things changing. Can't really believe she's going away. Was shitty to her for years, you know?” He cleared his throat, setting down his cup.

“It's been good for a while, though, now, hasn't it?”

“Yeah... Just feels like now that we're somewhere good, it's changing again. She's changing. Moving on.”

Nancy turned more towards him, wrapping her arms around him. His

breath exhaled softly against her shoulder, and she smiled. “You can make things change for yourself, you know?” she whispered, squeezing him closer. “You can move on from there, too.”

“Nance...” Billy pulled back. “You know I can't. Susan... She's not just gonna take my money, and how the hell would I ever even explain to her... What I'm doing here.”

Nancy thought of Susan, their little talks in the grocery store, their weekly dinners. She was sure she was the proudest mother in the crowded assembly when she saw Max walking across the stage, then again when Susan turned her head to look at Billy, squeezing his hand as they cheered.

“Tell her the truth. She'll understand.”

“You can't know that.”

“I can't,” Nancy agreed. “But I think you know she will.”

“I'll fuck it up.” His voice suddenly had an edge of almost panic to it, so sharp that it caught in Nancy's own chest and made her reach for Billy again, hand on his thigh to keep him close.

“What do you mean?”

“If I come here.” Billy's voice sounded tight, his eyes weren't on her,

but he spoke like it was supposed to be obvious. “I’ll fuck things up, it’s what I do.”

“Billy. That’s just... Stupid.”

“Gee, thanks.” He snorted, but his shoulders relaxed.

“Sorry, but, well, I mean it!” Nancy insisted. “I don’t know if you noticed, but we’re a whole lot happier when you’re around. Plus, we don’t eat nearly as much fast food.”

“You don’t smell like KFC all the time, anymore,” Billy managed to joke, looking like he was starting to breathe a little easier again.

“See? You take care of us. We care about you, and we like to think we take care of you, too.”

“Yeah. Yeah, of course.” Billy nodded quickly. The shit they’d done for him. They’d taken a *chance* on him. Not just for a job, but letting him into their lives after their history. There was no reason they had to do that except that they were good people. Billy wasn’t, but he could be good to them. Maybe that could just be close enough that he wouldn’t ruin this.

He shook his head, raked his fingers through his curls, and breathed in. The air was heavy with the mix of chlorine, beer, and weed. The haze he’d lived in most of high school. Old times. He looked out at

Maxine and her friends. Maybe not old times, after all. They could handle the shit coming at them, the new times, and, he could not be a complete chicken shit and handle it, too.

He leaned in close, gave Nancy a little kiss, just the barest of pecks on her cheek, hearing her surprised noise and laughing shamelessly. It wasn't like if he told Susan Max wasn't gonna know, and if Max knew, *everyone* at this little shindig was gonna know before long.

"I gotta head." He pushed off the tiles, and looked down at Nancy who was smiling with flushed cheeks, more the alcohol than any real embarrassment, he suspected.

"Good luck."

"Yeah, yeah." Billy waved it off, more bravado than he actually felt as he left the party and started to head home.

"Billy? You're home earlier than I thought... Everything's alright?" Susan was settled on the couch, a blanket over her shoulders. She looked like she'd been ready to stay up for a while, a cup of coffee and a book on her lap. He just now realized that she probably hadn't planned on sleeping until Max was home safe from partying. It was such a mom thing it made the corner of his mouth tic up into a little smile. He nodded after, not wanting her to worry.

“Yeah. Kids are still having the time of their lives. Steve and Nancy had a handle on things. They promised to keep looking out and drive everyone home whenever they finally tire themselves out. Was just feeling kinda partied-out, myself.” He walked over to the couch, lowering himself to sit slowly. Funny. He'd never really thought of himself as a person who'd ever one day get 'partied out'.

“That's nice.” Susan smiled, and slid the little bowl of popcorn she'd made herself closer towards them in offering. “I hope you thanked them again, for me. I don't want to know what they're getting up to, but I'm happy knowing they all have a safe place to do it, and someone to get them all home in one piece.”

“They're happy to do it.”

“They're good people.”

“Yeah, they are... I know I been spending a lot of time there. Guess that's hard to miss. I didn't really know how to talk to you about it... But you deserve to know, I think. Things with them, and me are... Different.” Billy let the statement linger. Because that was pretty much all he had.

Susan closed her book, seeming to realize this was important, taking in the vague words. She looked Billy in the eyes, kept his gaze even if it made him feel like squirming or just heading right to bed instead of what this was about to be.

“You know,” she finally spoke, “I know we don't really... talk about what happened. We used to move around this house like clockwork.

I'd be in the kitchen, so you'd be in the living room. You'd be in your bedroom, so I'd clean the house. Anything to ignore the other person living there. Together, but separate. If I'm honest... I was a little scared of you, Billy. I saw your father in your eyes."

That. That made Billy flinch, a hurt more visceral than another being shoving through his body and tearing it apart. He started to move, and Susan's hand touched his knee, freezing him in place.

"Please, Billy, I'm not done..." She waited until he nodded curtly to continue.

"I know I don't know everything that happened that summer, or before that. But, when Neil was gone, I feel like a cloud got lifted from this house. Something dark that was keeping all of us down, and alone even when we were all in the same place together," she said, and Billy nodded seriously with her, chest tight.

"When I heard you were still alive, hurt, and in the hospital, I wasn't sure what I'd do, if I should pack up your stuff. I knew you probably had friends you could stay with, that we all might be happier that way. I didn't know if I could have you in the house... So I went to see you. I don't think you remember, you were so out of it, but you were scared. You wouldn't let go of my hand. I think you thought I was..."

He'd thought she was his mom. Billy hadn't remembered, but the memory lurched back into his brain then. He'd thought it had been the medication, his mother holding his hand and whispering that he was ok, that he was safe. *Oh.* Billy had had no idea it could have been...

“Thank you.” Billy scrubbed a quick hand over his face. “For that.”

“That's not why I told you.” Susan shook her head, smiling through a little teariness to her eyes. “I told you because that was when I realized you had *more* to you than what I had seen before. I knew right then that I couldn't just leave you there, or send you out of the house once you were on your feet. And you *proved* yourself after that, to all of us. I never once saw your father in you after that. I think that's how I knew you'd end up ok... ”

And you did. You've always been here for us. Max has a big brother, now, and I like to think I have a son. I'm proud of you... I'm happy for you. Oh god.” She laughed at herself and wiped her face. “I'm sorry, I'm going on, and you're just trying to tell me, well, I don't know what, but I just want you to know it's ok. Ok?”

“Ok.” Billy choked out the word past a lump in his throat. He wasn't sure when his hand had gone to Susan's, but he'd been squeezing it like a lifeline through the rolling wave of emotion she'd just put him through. It'd been too long since he'd been in the surf, it felt like drowning. He couldn't speak without the air, so he just sat there, holding her hand and feeling like an asshole as he tried to remember how to breathe.

Susan rubbed her hand over his, seeming to understand he was recovering, or that at least he couldn't continue what he'd just started. She seemed to be weighing something on her mind, and she hesitated before she spoke again. “Billy... Please don't get upset with me asking, but is Nancy Steve and your, what's the word... Beard?”

“What? *No.*” Billy barked out a sharp laugh, the surprise from it making him relax, remember how to float in the waves so he could

breathe in again. He came down, shook his head. “It’s not... How do you even know that word?” he finally asked, laughing again. Susan barely watched television with him and Max, and she didn’t seem to keep up with the ‘times’ much, as far as he’d known.

“Billy, honey, I taught dance classes in California,” Susan pointed out with an amused tilt of her head. He looked at her in stunned silence before he laughed again.

“Alright, point taken, But, no, it’s...” Billy rubbed a hand against the back of his neck. Now or never, really, with that kind of opening given. “It’s, uh. Kinda all three of us.”

“Oh.” Susan looked surprised, taking it in, her voice a little softer on her repeated. “Oh.” More understanding. “I suppose that explains a few things.”

Billy nodded quickly, studying the coffee table instead of her face. He was still recovering from his earlier onslaught of emotions, but this part felt good. Like a relief. She was the first person to know, the first person any of them had told, and it felt nice to say it out loud. Realer.

“It’s pretty serious. I just thought... Well, I don’t know. I guess I just wanted you to know. Better than it somehow getting out and you finding out that way, I guess,” he said, tone more defensive the quieter Susan was. Even after what she’d said... It was hard for him to relax. He finally hazarded a glance towards her. Her thoughtful expression wasn’t as bad as he’d expected, so he just shut his mouth and waited for her to say something.

“Well... It's a little different,” Susan finally said. “It's definitely not what I imagined would happen with you. And I'm going to worry... But that's what mothers do, you know?” She reached over and placed a delicate hand over his. “What I want, Billy... What I really want, for both of you, is to just be *happy*. And if this is what does that... Well, I'm glad you told me.”

He nodded quickly, feeling his face burn and his chest get all hot again. “Thanks...Thank you. *Mom*.” Billy was whispering by the end of the sentence, feeling the word almost stick in his throat. But it didn't feel like a betrayal when he said it, like he always thought it would. It felt more like honoring those memories with someone else who also deserved that title.

Susan didn't say anything, but her eyes were still damp when she pulled him into a warm hug, gave him a little pat on the back.

“I'm not telling Maxine. You are.”

“Shit.”

9. Chapter 9

They'd finally unpacked the last box. Susan had gone out with Max to look at paint samples for the room she'd be staying in whenever she was home for break, and well, they were taking *advantage* of that absence.

Nancy had already ridden his face while Steve fucked her from behind until she was squealing. They'd worked her up so bad her entire body was trembling when she couldn't stop coming on Billy's tongue. She'd tried to squirm off of him once or twice, but Steve had cruelly held her hips in place so that Billy could lap and tongue at her clit.

They hadn't given their Nance much choice but to take it until she'd finally had to shove at Billy's head, begging them off. They'd coaxed one more slow orgasm out of her, little strokes of Billy's tongue, Steve's hands massaging her tits until she'd fallen apart then back into Steve's arms with an exhausted sigh.

"Unreal. And so unfair." She flopped out beside Billy, smacking his hand when it touched her thigh and her entire body threatened to spasm again with overstimulation. "No!"

"Ok, ok." Billy relented, laughing and sitting up to look at Steve. He had some idea of mischief they could get into, and Nancy seemed to know it, too, recovering enough to sit up and watch.

They'd bought the lube weeks ago. Out of town. It was better than lotion. Smoother, and Billy had been *pretty* sure it was Steve's turn to try it out, but, there he was, legs sprawled out as he laid over Steve's

lap doing something that he'd have fucking killed someone for even suggesting was a possibility a few years ago.

Steve's fingers pushed a little harder inside of him, and he gasped out past Nancy's finger tracing slowly over his bottom lip.

"Stevie, think he likes it," she murmured, and god damn this was such a bad idea to do when he'd just been so ruthless with her. "You should go a little faster," she suggested, eyes glinting in the light when Billy's whined next, the sound sticking in his throat as Steve's fingers moved again, quicker.

Billy felt out of it. Both of them with him were too much. He was spinning. He reached for Nancy's hand, felt her sympathetic murmur against his knuckles as she kissed it when another whine was ripped from his chest, this one loud, no mistaking how needy it sounded.

This felt too good. Steve's fingers were thick, and he couldn't control them the same way he could his own during the brief little exploration he'd given himself in the shower to make sure this wasn't going to be awful. It burned, ached in that way Billy liked to feel in his muscles after a workout. He pushed into them, surprised by the punched out moan coming from his own chest. He wasn't usually this loud, every noise feeling like admission of guilt to how much he was enjoying this.

"God, you're hot. Super hot, baby," Steve whispered, sounding as raw as Billy felt. "You feel so soft inside, it's fucking unreal."

Shit, Steve's voice was doing things to him. Steve thought he felt

good inside, and it made Billy want to show him *how* good. “Fuck me, fuck me, ok?” he gritted out, squeezing Nancy's hand tighter.

Steve's hand went still and he made a surprised noise. Billy swore he could feel his dick twitch hard trapped against his belly. “Shit, you sure?”

“You gonna do it, or what?”

“Shut up, shut up. I'm processing,” Steve demanded, and his broad hand suddenly swung down on Billy's ass in a little slap.

Shit. Billy grit his teeth as the tingle to his skin shivered all the way down to his toes. He would die before he let Steve know how much he'd liked *that*. When he glanced up, Nancy's eyes were locked with his, and fuck, she knew. She knew, and she'd definitely use that against him, later.

He'd swear her to silence. Later. For now, he moved forward, brow furrowing at the sensation of Steve's fingers leaving him. “Process later. Fuck now,” Billy ordered, bossy and not giving a shit as long as it got him what he wanted. His brain kept cycling back and forth between shame of just how good this felt, and the reality of how *ok* that was. This was safe, and he didn't have to be fucking embarrassed over how good they could make them feel, no matter how they did it.

He told himself that when he felt the head of Steve's cock pushing at his rim, and then he wasn't thinking about anything except that stretch. Steve was slow, and Billy didn't know how he could be so *slow* about pushing inside of him. Billy felt like he was dying for it,

whining like a bitch. He shook off the thought, it was easy with Steve's warm hand on his belly, holding him steady. Billy panted under him, more worked up the more Steve filled him, *took* him. When their thighs touched, he lost it, a full body shudder starting in his spine and running all the way down to his toes.

"Steve, Fuck! Fuck me," Billy whined in a way that absolutely wrecked Steve. He gasped behind him and pushed his hips. His thrusts started out shaky, faltering until Nancy shifted to sit up on her knees and put a hand on his hip to help him keep rhythm.

Billy felt *amazing*, and he told him so in a quick babble. Steve couldn't believe how good it was to be inside of him, to watch his muscles shifting, feel him sigh and moan and know he was the one fucking him and doing that. It was a lot to take in, it was hard not to lose his own head over. His hips jerked forward, too fast, making a little whimper bubble up from Billy's lips.

"Come on, he needs you, baby. We've gotta treat him right," Nancy whispered, lips clinging softly to the shell of Steve's ear when she kissed him there, grounded him. Steve bobbed his head in agreement. That's all he wanted, was to treat them right.

He started to roll his hips more, a slow churn that kept himself deep. It was the same stroke he knew Nancy loved, and he hoped Billy would, too. It kept them close, kept him deep inside of Billy. He pressed his chest against Billy's strong back. He could feel his shaky breaths that way. He'd gone almost soundless, no words, just little pants and gasps of pleasure.

Steve's hand went around his body and circled around Billy's cock, wet all over the tip and only leaking more. That touch finally seemed to break the spell of silence, because Billy gave a little *yeah*, and pushed back onto Steve's cock more, starting to meet every roll of his hips with a learning curve that Steve frankly found unfair.

It was almost too much, if Steve was being honest, but he held on, kept moving, pumped Billy's cock in quick strokes that he'd learned he liked. He listened to Billy give a pleased, hedonistic moan under him that turned into a hoarser cry when Steve fucked into him a little faster. That had him going off. Steve felt the telltale twitch of his cock in his hand, and Billy was suddenly shuddering under him, come making a new mess on Steve's hand as his hole pulsed and squeezed down harder on him.

"Fuck, that was hot—*uh*," Steve had started to do the polite thing and slide out of Billy so he could finish in his hand or between his thighs, he'd take anything right now, but Billy had other ideas because he was suddenly gripping down harder on his cock.

"Stop—Come on, come in me," Billy gritted out, ass pushing back on Steve's cock more the second he started to pull back, making Steve gasp out. "What are you gonna do, knock me up?"

"Shut up." Steve laughed, grabbing for Billy's hip to keep him in place. He pushed deep again, felt him shudder under him, his fingers grabbing onto the blankets as he fucked him through the glow of aftershocks. Billy was whining again, a higher keen that Steve didn't heed because he didn't want to get yelled at again, and because, frankly, he was too close to even think about it, anymore.

"Almost, almost, baby," he whispered out, fingers gripping tight into

Billy's hip, knuckles white, bruising warm skin as he let go, came inside of Billy with a low moan, head tipped back and eyes closed. He couldn't focus on anything, just the heat on his skin and the pulse of pleasure thrumming through his body.

Billy slipped off of him, but Steve was still coming down slow, like riding the wave of a really good high. He sighed finally, cracking an eye open and smiling at how Billy looked sprawled out on the bed, skin gleaming in a light sheen and his body all loose. He could see his coming dripping down his legs and *damn* that was hot.

He must have said it out loud, because Billy snorted.

"I dunno, feels kinda weird." He shifted around more on the bed, clearly giving a little wriggle to test the sensation.

"You get used to it," Nancy said simply, patting a hand down his back. "It looks really hot," she agreed, squeaking when Billy's arm circled around her, pulling her down with him for a kiss.

"If you needed something..."

"Don't even *think* about it, I'm still shaking," Nancy protested under him, her fingers pushing at his head before she shuddered, eyes slowly closing when Billy's head dropped down and he mouthed softly over one of her perky nipples.

"Yeah?" He breathed out hotly over her skin, and Nancy moaned,

seeming to come to her senses and pushing at his head.

“Yes,” she insisted, and both of the boys laughed before Billy finally let her go to lie down beside her. He stretched out more, seemed to revel in all of the afterglow.

“You’re doing it next, gotta try it,” he mumbled, rubbing his face into the pillow before he rolled over slowly to face him.

“Yeah?”

“Yeah. Gonna make you scream,” Billy promised with sinful smirk that made Steve’s body burn hotter again, almost ready to find out right then and there if Billy could back up the claim.

He was tired, though. Moving had been exhausting, and they’d promised Max they’d put the last touches on her halfpipe today so she got as much use out of it as she could before she headed to Chicago. Nancy had also made him promise they’d all go to Susan’s first dance class tomorrow afternoon. There was a business meeting first thing Monday morning... The list went on, and Steve thought it sounded so much better to just squeeze his arms around Billy, grinning when Nancy forced the blonde into being the little spoon.

“You’re too little,” Billy grumbled like he did every time, like they both couldn’t see how much he liked it, how his lashes fluttered softly when Nancy’s sweet lips kissed the nape of his neck and across his shoulders.

Just like they were now. Steve reached up to caress his thumb over Billy's cheekbone, down into the curve of his sleepy smile. "She's perfect. You're perfect."

"You're dumb," Billy mumbled past his thumb, which Steve rubbed across his lips to shut him up. Like it had any hope of working.

"And perfect," Steve corrected, leaning over Billy to give Nancy a kiss, and grinning at the way Billy's nose wrinkled before he heaved out a sleepy sigh and settled. His next words were soft, like he could somehow whisper out an 'I love you' to them and get away with neither of them noticing he'd finally said it.

Steve and Nancy glanced at each other, sharing a little smile before they looked back down at Billy, and spoke softly in unison.

"Obviously."